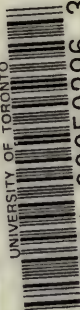


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Richard Brathwait's Comments,

in 1665,

upon

Chaucer's Tales of the Miller  
and the Wife of Bath.

EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION,

BY

C. F. E. SPURGEON,

ASSOCIATE OF KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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### RICHARD BRATHWAIT.

Born about 1588. Flourished 1611-1665. Died 1673.

THE writer of these 'Comments' is an interesting specimen of the country magnate, of good family and literary tastes, of 17th century England. The two principal authorities as to the facts of Richard Brathwait's life<sup>1</sup>—Antony A. Wood and Joseph Haslewood—tell us that he was the second son of Thomas Brathwait, and of Dorothy his wife, daughter of Robert Bindloss of Haulston, Westmoreland. Richard's father, and his fathers before him, possessed a good freehold domain in the county of Westmoreland.

According to Wood, Richard "became a Commoner of Oriel College A.D. 1604, aged 16, and was matriculated as a gentleman's son and a native of the Co<sup>y</sup>. of Northumberland" [*sic*].

Later he removed to Cambridge to read law, and an account of himself at this time is to be found in his "Holy Memorials, or Heavenly Memento's" (1638), which is a kind of Brathwaitian "Prelude," giving a detailed account of the author's life, continuing even up to his death, which he anticipates by some 35 years. Under the heading '*His Labours*,' Brathwait says :

"Free-bred were my Studies : so as, *Lapwing*-like, with shell on head, I begun to write, before my *yeares* could well make mee an *Author*. But hence my teares ! The *Subjects* I made choyce of ; were of *Love* . . . . I was proud in bearing the title of a *Writer* ; which, I must confesse, together with the instancie of such as either truly-applauded mee, or deluded mee, made me ambitious after the name of an *Author*."

Again, when telling of *His Life*, Brathwait says that his Parents wished him to study Law, "which I must confesse suited not well

<sup>1</sup> The article in the *Dictionary of National Biography* adds no new facts as to Brathwait's life.

with my disposition : for the fresh fragrant flowers of Divine Poesie and Morall Philosophy could not like to be removed nor transported to those thorny places and plashes of the Law. But no remedy ; with an unwilling farewell I tooke my leave of *Philosophy* ; to addresse my Studies to that *knowledge* which at first seemed so far different from my element."

We hear little further of his pursuit of the legal profession, but judging from the books he has left, he continued to give free rein to his fancies in "Divine Poesie and Morall Philosophy."

He first married in 1617, Frances, daughter of James Lawson of Nesham, near Darlington. Living for many years at Burneshead (part of the family estate which his father had left him), Brathwait "became" (says Wood) "Captain of a Foot Co<sup>r</sup>. in the Trained Bands, a D<sup>y</sup>-Lt. in the Co. of Westmoreland, a Justice of the Peace, and a noted Wit and Poet. He wrote and published several books in English, consisting of prose and poetry, highly commended in the age wherein published, but since slighted and despised as frivolous matters, and only to be taken into the hands of novices."

Joseph Haslewood does not like this summary dismissal of Brathwait's claims as an author, and says that as the writer of *Barnabee's Journal*, "it will scarcely be denied that he possessed a native and unsophisticated wit and humour, a perspicuity of expression, a dance of imagery and a facility of metre" which rank him amongst the authors who will live.

Brathwait's wife died in 1633, and he appears to have so greatly mourned her loss, that he published two copies of verses to commemorate her worth and virtues. Six years later he married again, Mary, daughter of Roger Crofts of Kirtlington in Yorkshire. He describes her as a widow and a native of Scotland. Their son was the gallant Sir Strafford Brathwait, who was killed in the ship *Mary* under the command of Sir Roger Strickland, during an engagement with the Tyger-Algerine man-of-war.

Some time after his second marriage, Brathwait left Burneshead, probably to occupy the Manor-House at Catterick. Nothing much further is known about him, save that in May 1673 he died at East Appleton, and was buried in the parish church of Catterick. "He left behind him," says Wood, "the character of a well-bred gentleman and good neighbour."

The traditional account of his appearance which has descended to us, is, that he was one of the handsomest men of his day, for



although short in stature, he was very well proportioned. Two portraits of him were published in 1638. The first is prefixed to the "Nursery for Gentry," and is subscribed "Ætatis 48," with the motto *Meliori nascimur ævo*; and according to it he appears in the full vigour of health and strength: whereas in the second portrait given in the engraved title to the "Psalms," he has a more aged and grave appearance, this being probably thought in better keeping with the character of the book.

He was remarkable, we are told, "for ready wit and humour, charitable to the poor in the extreme, so much as to have involved himself in difficulties by it.

"He commonly wore a light-grey coat, red waistcoat, and leather breeches. His hat was a high-crowned one, and beyond what was common in those days when such hats were worn."

Such is the picture handed down to us of this typical English squire, of an open free nature and strong individual character, with a kind heart and a sense of fun, bestowing an attention on his person and his dress which earned for him the name by which he was universally known, of "Dapper Dick."

His own summary of himself is probably the best that could be made of him: "The most," he writes, "that can be now said of me is this: *He was a man in his time*" ('Holy Memorials of his Age,' p. 389).

Brathwait had early announced himself "ambitious after the name of an author," and he evidently had the pen of a ready writer. During the years he "flourished" (1611-1665), as Haslewood quaintly styles it, he seems to have published some forty volumes,<sup>1</sup> on every variety of subject. Nothing seemed to come amiss to him, prose and poetry, satires and love songs, dramas and versified Psalms.

He certainly had a very pretty and ingenious taste in titles, most of which conjure up weird pictures before us, as to the possible contents of their respective volumes.

Such for instance are:—

"Spiritual Spicerie: Containing Sundrie Sweet tractates of Devotion and Piety," 1638.

"A Strappado for the Divell," 1615.

<sup>1</sup> W. C. Hazlitt, in his edition of *Barnabee's Journal* (London, 1876), gives a list of forty-seven volumes published by Brathwait, of which five were 2nd editions.

"Times Cvrtaine Drawne," 1621, or The Anatomie of Vanitie, with other Choice Poems, entituled Health from Helicon, 1625.

"Britains Bath."

As, however, we are concerned mainly with Brathwait's relation to Chaucer, there is only one of these volumes of interest to us in this connection, in addition to the present reprint. This is one, bearing, perhaps, the most unlikely title of all :—

"The Smoaking Age, or the man in the mist, with the life and death of Tobacco," 1617.

This volume ends with a Poem which runs as follows, called :

#### CHAUCER'S INCENSED GHOST.

From the frequented path where Mortals tread,  
Old-aged CHAUCER having long retir'd,  
Now to revisit Earth at last desir'd,  
Hath from the dead rais'd his impall'd head,  
Of purpose to converse with humane seed,  
And taxe them too, for bringing him o' th' stage  
In writing that he knew not in his age.

'Las ; is it fit the stories of that book,  
Couch'd and compil'd in such a various forme,  
Which art and nature joyntly did adorne,  
On whose quaint Tales succeeding ages look,  
Should now lie stifled in the steems of smোক,  
As if no poet's genius could be ripe  
Without the influence of Pot and Pipe ?

No, no, yee *English Moors*, my Muse was fed  
With purer substance than your *Indian* weede ;  
My breathing Nosethrills were from Vapors freed,  
With Nectar and Ambrosia nourished,  
While hospitality so flourished  
In great mens kitchens ; where I now suppose  
Lesse smoake comes from their chimneys than their nose.

But I heare some prepar'd to question mee,  
The reason why I am so freely bent  
In such sad straines to publish my complaint,  
Or what strict *Mamothrept* that man should bee,  
Who has done Chaucer such an injurie ;  
Whose tongue, though weake, yet is his heart as strong  
To call them to account that did him wrong.



Ple tell it yee, and must expect redresse ;  
Wold any of you hold it not a blot  
To father such a brat hee never got ?  
Or would he not ingenuously confesse,  
Hee'd rather wish himselfe quite issue lesse ?  
Conceive this well ; for if it be a crime,  
As sure it is, such is the Case of mine.

Downe by a secret Vault as I descended,  
Pent in with darknesse save some little ray,  
Which by a private cranie made his way,  
By helpe whereof I saw what me offended,  
Yet found no meanes to have the fault amended :  
Fixt to a post, (such was poore Chaucer's lot)  
I found my name to that I never wrot.

And what might be the Subject ? no relation  
Sad, solid, serious, morall, or divine,  
Which sorted with the humours of my time,  
But a late Negro's introduced fashion,  
Who brought his drugs here to corrupt our Nation :  
'Gainst which, because its used in excesse,  
My Muse must mount, that she may it suppress.

Now some may well object, as many will,  
This taske adds rather glory to my name,  
Than any way seemes to impaire the same ;  
But I say no ; Chaucer would thinke it ill  
To plant Tobacco on Parnassus hill :  
Sacred the Synod of the Muses bee,  
Nor can such weeds spring from Apollo's tree.

Besides, what danger might Prescription bring !  
For had the use of it been knowne to me,  
It might have pleaded well antiquitie ;  
But th' Poets of my time knew no such thing,  
How could they then of such a subject sing ?  
No ; th' age we liv'd was form'd of milder stuffe,  
Then to take ought, like Malecontents, in snuffe.

Pure are the crystall streames of Hippocrene ;  
Choice the dimensions which her Bards expresse ;  
Cleare is their heart as th' Art which they professe :  
How should they relish then ought that's uncleane,  
Or waste their oyle about a smoaky dreame ?  
Farre bee't Minerva should consume her Taper  
In giving life or lustre to a Vapor.

The TALES\* I told, if morally applide,  
 How light soe're, or wanton to the show,  
 Yet they in very deed were nothing so ;  
 For were the marke they aym'd at but descrie,  
 Even in these dayes they would be verifide ;  
 And like Sybillas Oracles esteem'd,  
 Worth worlds of wealth, how light soe're they seem'd.

Witness my *Miller*, and my *Carpenter*,  
 The amorous stories of my *Wife of Bath*,  
 Which such variety of humours hath ;  
 My *Priour*, *Manciple*, and *Almoner*,  
 My subtile *Sumner*, and the *Messenger* ;  
 All which though moulded in another age,  
 Have rais'd new subjects both for *Presse* and *Stage*.

Yet note these times disrelishing my tongue,  
 Whose Idioms-distaste by nicer men  
 Hath made me mince it like a Citizen !  
 Which Chaucer holds a manifest wrong,  
 To force him leave what he had used so long :  
 Yea, he dislikes this polishing of art,  
 Which may refine the Core, but spoiles the heart.

But yet in serious sadnesse I impute  
 This to no fate or destiny of mine,  
 But to the barraine Brain-wormes of this time ;  
 Whose Muse lesse pregnant, present or acute,  
 Affording nought that with the age can sute,  
 Like to the truant Bee, or lazie Drone,  
 Robbe other Bee-hives of their honny-combe.

And which is worse ; this worke they make their owne,  
 Which they have pruned, purged, and refin'd,  
 And aptly form'd it to the Author's mind ;  
 When I'm assured, if the truth were knowne,  
 They reape the crop which was by others sowne :  
 Yea, theese usurpers to that passe are brought,  
 They'll foyst in that wee neither said nor thought.

This, this it was incens'd old Chaucer's Ghost,  
 And caus'd him vent his passion in this sort,  
 And for a while to leave th' Elysian Court,  
 Where honest Authors are esteemed most :  
 But such as on the Dead-Mens labours boast  
 Excluded are, enjoyn'd by Fate to won  
 Vpon the scorching banks of Phlegeton.

\* Whose pleasing Comments are shortly to bee published.

Yee then, whose measures merit well the name  
 And Title yee retaine, Poets, I meane,  
 Bedew'd with influence from Hippocrene,  
 As yee professants seeme, so be the same,  
 And with your own pennes eternize your fame :  
 Shun these *Pipe-Pageants* ; for there seldom come  
 Tobacco-Factors to Elysium.

From this poem we learn that Brathwait had, as early as the year 1617, (aged 29) written, and intended shortly to publish these "pleasing Comments." What prevented him bringing them out until 48 years later we do not know ; unless it were that he hoped to write comments on all the Tales, which intention he never carried out.

He tells us himself that the work had been " begun and finished in his blooming years, when the heat of conceit more than the depth of intellect dictated to his pen." <sup>1</sup> Eventually he was persuaded to publish them, as others have done, at the instance of " sundry persons of Quality."

These critics, so Brathwait tells us in his 'Appendix,' said some very pretty things about his 'Comments,' and urged him to write more, "*ingenuously protesting, that they had not read any Subject discoursing by way of Illustration, and running Descant on such Light, but Harmless Fancies, more handsomely couched nor modestly shadowed.*"

Gratifying as this must have been for the author to hear, he was not to be persuaded to write more Comments "*were they never so pregnant,*" for he was now an old man of nearly 80, and

"Of such light Toyes Hee'd ta'n a long Adew,  
 Nor did He mean his knowledge to renew."

We cannot, unfortunately, agree with the estimate of Brathwait's contemporaries (as recorded by himself) with respect to these 'Comments.' Regarded as literature, and for their own intrinsic merit, they are worth little. They tell us nothing which a fairly intelligent reader could not discover for himself, and the most interesting passages are of value to us now only because of their age and quaintness. Such for instance are the anecdotes here and there interposed as illustrating some point in the Tales, that about S. Paul's Cloak on p. 13 ; the young man and the responses, p. 40 ; or the widow who buried four husbands (p. 61).

<sup>1</sup> Appendix (p. 97).

The old "Sylvane Charm," quoted on p. 19 in connection with the Carpenter's 'Night Spell,' and the versified rendering of the flitch of bacon (p. 42) have an antiquarian interest. But that is all; for the rest, the 'Comments' are but a prose rendering, and sometimes a rather wearisome expansion of the 'Tales.' Take for an example of this aimless prolixity, the opening remark on the 'Millers Tale,' where Brathwait in 123 words points out that it adds life and realism to any story to make mention of the Place, Person, Profession, with other circumstances concurring, and that for this reason Chaucer has mentioned that the Carpenter lived at Oxford.

When, however, we consider the date both of the composition and of the publication of these Comments, and the age of their author, and then look upon them in their relation to the history of Chaucer criticism, they form a very interesting link between the hearty and general appreciation which Chaucer received from the Elizabethans, and the neglect and misunderstanding he encountered towards the end of the 17th century.

All the great Elizabethans, who have left any record on the subject, unite in looking upon Chaucer as the greatest of English poets. Spenser with whole-hearted admiration looked to him as his master:

"Dan Chaucer, well of English undefil'd  
On Fame's Eternal Bead-roll worthy to be fil'd."  
(*F. Q.*, Bk. 4, C. 2, st. 31.)

Sidney, in his *Defence of Poesie* (1598), speaks reverently of him, if more critically than does Spenser.

"Chaucer undoubtedly did excellently well in his *Troilus* and *Cresseid*, of whom truly I know not whether to marvel more, either that he in that mystic time could see so clearly, or that we in this clear age go so stumblingly after him. Yet has he great wants, fit to be forgiven in so reverent an Antiquitie."

The critics, Ascham, Gascoigne, Puttenham and Webbe, all uphold and admire him, though for different reasons. Ascham, who praises the "English Homer" unreservedly, still deplores that he contented himself with "barbarous and rude Ryming." Gascoigne actually commends Chaucer for the supposed irregularity in the number of his syllables, as being an approach to the classical method of marking the verse by quantity. Webbe, whilst acknowledging that though the manner of Chaucer's style "may seem blunt and course to many fine English eares at these days," yet says "in truth if it be equally



pondered and with good judgment advised, and confirmed with the time wherein he wrote, a man shall perceive thereby even a true picture or perfect shape of a right Poet." (*Discourse of English Poetrie*, 1586.)

Puttenham, in his *Arte of English Poesie* (1589), shows his intimate knowledge and thorough appreciation of Chaucer, to whom he refers continually, calling him the "Father of our English Poets," and "the most renowned of them all, for the much learning appeareth to be in him above any of the rest."

I have quoted from these writers because they are typical Elizabethans in their attitude towards Chaucer. They are not speaking from hearsay, but are well acquainted with the poet's works, and as a result of knowing him thoroughly, they love and admire him, whilst, at the same time, acknowledging that his language is antiquated, and his style perhaps blunt.

This is exactly Brathwait's position. For him, Chaucer is the "Ancient, Renowned and Ever Living Poet" (title page), the "English Homer," our incomparable Chaucer (p. 33), who "for his Rich Fancy, Pregnant Invention and Present Composure, deserved the Countenance of a Prince and his Laureat Honour."

It is evident that Brathwait knows his Chaucer thoroughly, and takes genuine delight in him, as for instance in his appreciation of the Knight's Tale on p. 1, and his reference to the other Tales in verse 12 of the poem of *Chaucer's Incensed Ghost*.

Could his life be renewed he tells us, "*his Youthful Genius could not bestow his Endeavour on any Author with more Pleasure nor Complacency to Fancy, than the Illustrations of Chaucer.*"

Brathwait is Elizabethan also in his delight in the moral worth of Chaucer; for he points out in his poem that the *Canterbury Tales* if morally applied are

"Worth worlds of wealth, how light so e're they seem."

Braithwait, like Webbe and others, feels himself called upon to make excuse for Chaucer's language and style, and is forced to take a very curious position in order to defend his favourite. He contends that the substance of what Chaucer says is so good, that the manner of saying it matters comparatively little.

In the Appendix to this volume, in answer to the carping critic who wishes Chaucer's language were better, Braithwait says (p. 98): "*Sir, It appears, you prefer Speech before the Headpiece, Language*

before Invention; whereas Weight of Judgment has ever given Invention priority before Language. And not to leave you dissatisfied, As the time wherein these Tales were writ rendered him incapable of the one, So his Pregnancy of Fancy approv'd him incomparable for the other." And again in the poem, when on the same topic, Brathwait asserts that Chaucer

"dislikes this polishing of art,  
Which may refine the Core, but spoiles the heart."

Brathwait thus clings steadily to the tradition of his youth. Chaucer—for him—is still the greatest of English poets, as well as the first; his teaching is sound and moral, his imagination and wit incomparable; yet, owing to the dark age in which he lived, his style is often rude and rough.

By the time, however, that Brathwait, as an old man, published these Comments, public opinion in England had undergone a very great and significant change, with regard to the merits of Chaucer.

Although the poet's name continued for some time to wield power, his works were less widely read. Thus in 1628, John Earle, by a remark in his *Microcosmographie* indicates that he was then called the greatest of English poets, only by those who preferred to follow convention and tradition, rather than to use their own judgment. In describing the character of *A Vulgar Spirited Man*, Earle says he is one "that cries Chaucer for his Money above all our English Poets, because the voice ha's gone so, and he ha's read none."

Even those who still genuinely admired Chaucer, thought he had had his day, and was too rough and old-fashioned to endure;<sup>1</sup> and by the end of the century he was frankly looked upon as antiquated and barbaric, by the highest authorities in these matters.

So that three years after the publication of Brathwait's 'Comments' we find Edmund Waller writing:

<sup>1</sup> See Daniel's *Musophilus* as early as 1599:

"For what hy races hath there come to fall  
With low disgrace, quite vanished and past,  
Since Chaucer liv'd, who yet lives and yet shall,  
Though (which I grieve to say) but in his last.  
Yet what a time hath he wrested from time,  
And won upon the mighty waste of daies  
Vnto th' immortall honor of our clime.

Vnto the Sacred Relicks of whose rime  
We yet are bound in zeal to offer praise."



"Poets that lasting marble seek  
Must carve in Latin or in Greek :  
We write in sand, our language grows  
And like the tide, our work o'erflows !"

"Chaucer his sense can only boast  
The glory of his Numbers lost !  
Years have defaced his matchless strain  
And yet he did not sing in vain."

(*On English Verse*, 1668.)

Six years later, Edward Phillips, the nephew of Milton, wrote :

"True it is that the style of Poetry till Henry the 8<sup>th</sup> time, and partly also within his reign, may very well appear uncouth strange and unpleasant to those that are affected only with what is familiar and accustomed to them, not but there were even before those times some that had their Poetical excellencies if well examin'd, and chiefly among the rest, *Chaucer*, who thro' all the neglect of former ag'd Poets still keeps a name, being by some few admired for his real worth, to others not displeasing for his facetious way, which joyn'd with his old English intertains with a kind of Drollery."

(*Theatrum Poetarum*, 1674.)

There are numberless other references of a like description, from this time on to the end of the century. Those most favourable to Chaucer point out that he deserves respect and mention—if not for intrinsic merit—then because of his antiquity.

He was the first, says Drayton, who

"enriched our English with his rhymes  
And was the first of ours that ever brake  
Into the Muses treasure."

(*Epistle to Henry Reynolds*.)

And Sir John Denham likens him to the "morning star" which dissipates the mists and clouds of night.<sup>1</sup>

The unfavourable criticisms culminate in Addison's startling judgment delivered in 1694, in his *Account of the Greatest English Poets*; where he says :

"Long had our dull forefathers slept supine,  
Nor felt the raptures of the tuneful Nine  
Till Chaucer first, a merry bard, arose,  
And many a story told in ryme and prose.  
But age has rusted what the poet writ,  
Worn out his language and obscured his wit :  
In vain he jests in his unpolished strain,  
And tries to make his readers laugh in vain."

<sup>1</sup> On the Death of Cowley, 1667.

Without enumerating more examples then, it is evident, that when Braithwait published his little volume in 1665, containing a few whole-hearted words in praise of him whom he never doubted was the greatest of English Poets, "the famous the ever living" Chaucer, the old man's opinions and literary tastes were quite behind the times, thoroughly old-fashioned and obsolete. They widely differed from those held by Mr. Waller and Mr. Cowley,<sup>1</sup> and later by Mr. Addison; but they dated back to the days when Edmund Spenser counted it his greatest honour to call "Dan Chaucer" master, and his highest aspiration to "follow" in the "footing" of his "fect."

Brathwait is then, as Professor Lounsbury says, a "survival," but in the light of a survival he is very interesting.

His little book is one of the very few bright places of Chaucer criticism, during the time of gloom and neglect encountered by the old poet in the 17th century; and Brathwait himself seems to stand helping to bridge over this dreary interval, by reaching out a hand on the one side to Spenser, and on the other to Dryden, forming thus a link between one of the greatest of English poets and the greatest of English critics, who were at one in their appreciation of Geoffrey Chaucer.

C. F. E. SPURGEON.

38, Upper Gloucester Place, N. W.,  
March 1901.

*Note.*—The punctuation, as well as the spelling, of the 'Comments' are Brathwait's own.

<sup>1</sup> We are told by Dryden that Cowley, having been persuaded to read Chaucer over, declared he "had no taste of him."

A COMMENT  
Upon the  
Two Tales

OF OUR  
ANCIENT, RENOVVVED,  
and EVER LIVING POET  
Sr *JEFFRAY CHAUCER*, Knight.  
Who,  
For his Rich Fancy, Pregnant In-  
vention, and Present Composure,  
deserved the Countenance of a  
PRINCE, and his Laureat  
Honour.

---

The *MILLER'S TALE*,  
AND  
The *WIFE* of *BATH*.

---

Addressed and Published by Special Authority.

---

LONDON, Printed by *W. Godbid*, and  
are to be Sold by *Peter Dring* at the *Sun* in  
the *Poultrey* neer the *Rose-Tavern*. 1665.





TO THE HIGHLY HONOURED,  
AND NOBLY ACCOMPLISHED,  
S<sup>r</sup> *JOHN WINTOUR*,  
SÉCRETARY OF STATE  
TO HER SACRED MAJESTY,  
*THE QUEEN MOTHER*;  
A LOYAL SUBJECT  
*TO HIS SOVEREIGN*,  
A FAITHFUL SERVANT  
*TO HIS COUNTRY*,  
A RESOLUTE SUFFERER  
*FOR BOTH*;  
*R. B.*

HIS MOST DEVOTIONAL SERVITEURE  
PRESENTS THESE *ILLUSTRATIONS*,  
*PRIMARILY INTENDED*,  
&  
*PURPOSELY PUBLISHED*,  
FOR ENTERTAINMENT  
OF *RETIRED HOURS*.





This *Comment* was an *Assay*,  
whereto the *Author* was im-  
portun'd by Persons of Quali-  
ty, to compleat with Brief,  
Pithy, and Proper Illustrati-  
ons, Suitable to such Sub-  
jects.







## A Commentary upon Chaucer's Prologue to his Millers Tale.



Then that the Knight, &c.

Our Famous and ever-living *Chaucer*, having in his *Knight's Tale* expressed the sweet Comical passages of constant Love, covertly shadowed under the persons of *Palamon* and *Arcite* Corrivals in their Love to *Emely*: Our merry Host, infinitely delighted with the Pleasure of that Story, desires to have these Tales continued, as the Task was at first by him contrived.

Unboked is the male, &c.

A familiar and proper kind of Speech, implying how their Wits being now set awork, and the Male of their Conceits *unboked*, none should be so unsociably retired, as to ingross his Conceits to himself, and not have them discovered.

Now telleth Sir Monke,<sup>1</sup> &c.

He gives the Monk pre-eminence; but the drunken Miller admits of no such precedence: his Drink frees him from all Monastic reverence.

But in Pilates voice he began to crie,<sup>2</sup>  
And swore, &c.

Here he describes to life the humor of a Drunkard; Fearful Oaths are ever the overflows of full Pots.

Our host saw that he was dronken of ale  
And said, abide Robin leve brother,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Now telleth ye, sir Monk, if that ye come, (l. 10).

<sup>2</sup> But in Pilatës vois he gan to cryë, &c. (l. 16).

<sup>3</sup> Our Hostë saugh that he was dronke of ale, (l. 20)  
And sayde: 'abyd, Robin, my leve brother.'

A pleasant contest betwixt our Host and the Miller; whom he first mildly labours to perswade, but when no reason will prevail, he concludes,

— Tell on a devil way  
Thou art a fool, thy wit is overcome.

Wherein the Host discovers his anger, and in a passionate manner gives way to his humor.

Now herketh qd. the Miller, all and some,  
But first I make a protestacion  
That I am dronke, &c.

The Miller makes strong Liquor his Apology, purposely to procure more attention, and incur less offence: For true was his observation in Assayes of this nature:

*In telling tales, unless the truth we smother,  
In pleasing one, we may displease another.*

Right cautious are we then to be of the nature and humor of the hearer, and to peruse him, before we disclose our selves unto him.

— If I mispeake or say  
Write it the Ale of Southwarke, I you pray<sup>1</sup>

Like a true Ale-stake, he tels you where the best Ale is; and this was made good long ago, as may appear by that overworn Proverb,

*The nappy strong Ale of Southwirke  
Keeps many a Gossip fra the Kirke.*

He proceeds to the Argument of his Tale, in these words,

For I woll tell a Legende and a Life  
Both of a Carpenter and his wife &c.<sup>2</sup>

This is the Subject which must give life to his Tale: But entring into more free discourse of the Lightness of the Carpenter's Wife, and the Carpenter's disgrace, he is interrupted by the Reve in these words,

The Reve answered and said stint thy clap,<sup>3</sup> &c.

This Reve being of the same Profession, cannot endure to hear a Carpenter defam'd upon any condition. He taxeth him for laying such infamy on mens Wives.

*Whose spotless Honour is their highest treasure,  
And whose good name once lost, is lost for ever.*

<sup>1</sup> . . . if that I misspeke or seye, (l. 31)  
Wyte it the ale of Southwerk, I you preye;

<sup>2</sup> For I wol telle a legende and a lyf (l. 33)  
Bothe of a Carpenter, and of his wyf, &c.

<sup>3</sup> The Reve answerde and seyde, 'stint thy clappe, (l. 36).

This dronken Miller spake ful sone agen  
And said, leve brother Oswold,  
Who hath no wife is no Cockold.<sup>1</sup>

He proves that the Husband's Crest is in his Wifes Curtsie ;  
and to allay his fury, he confesseth freely that there are many good  
Wives, amongst which, the Reve's Wife may be one, for ought he  
knows of.

To demen of my self that I am one,  
I woll beleve that I am none.<sup>2</sup>

This agrees well with that Tenet, which applied seasonably, may  
afford a sovereign Receipt to Jealousie : It is better to be one, and  
think him none, than to be none, and think him one. The old  
Bard could sing as much :

*More blith that Cockold looks, who thinks him none,  
Than he who ne're was one, yet thinks him one.*

An husband should not be inquisitive  
Of Goddes privete, ne of his wife.<sup>3</sup>

An excellent Rule of direction, including a twofold Precept.  
First, Not to pry too curiously into the secret Cabinet of God's  
Divine Will. Secondly, Not to be too jealously inquisitive after  
the Actions of his Wife. For the former, as it is an Argument of  
too daring presumption ; so the later, of weakness and indiscretion.

What should I more say, but this Miller  
He nolde his word for no man forbere, &c.<sup>4</sup>

Here our ingenious *Chaucer* displays the Frontless boldness of a  
Rustick. On he will go with his Tale in spite of all opposition.  
In the end, our Poet, out of a native and free-bred Modesty, as one  
doubtful, lest some passages might offend the chast ear of a modest  
hearer, he directs him to other historical Tales, plenteously stored  
with singular Precepts of Morality ; which, together with his own  
Apology, he expresseth in these Lines, and so weaves up his  
Prologue.

—— Whoso list it not to here  
Tourne over the lefe, and chose another Tale.

<sup>1</sup> And seyde, 'leve brother Osëwold (l. 43)

Who hath no wyf, he is no cokëwold.

<sup>2</sup> As demen of my self that I were oon ; (l. 53)

I wol beleve wel that I am noon.

<sup>3</sup> Of goddes privetee, nor of his wyf. (l. 56).

<sup>4</sup> What sholde I more seyn, but this Millere (l. 59)

He nolde his wordes for no man forbere.



## A Comment upon the Miller's Tale.

Withom there was dwelling in Oxenford  
A rich gnofe, &c.<sup>1</sup>

It giveth no less life than probable light to any Story, to make mention of the Place, Person, Profession, with other Circumstances concurring. This induced our Poet here, as elsewhere throughout all his Tales, to express such a place where his Scene is formed, such persons to whose condition his Discourse is fitted, with all such passages, by which the concept of the Reader might become artfully entangled, his expectance pleasantly deceived, and the Plot at which he aimed, and by which he was directed, cunningly closed. You are to observe then, that the Scene here, is laid in *Oxford*; in which Shire, our Poet was born and educated, and by *Rich. 2.* with the Mannor of *Newholme*, in the same County endowed.

A rich gnofe.<sup>1</sup>

A rich grub, or miserable Caitiff, as I render it; which interpretation, to be proper and significant, I gather by the sence of that antient Metre,

*The Catiff Gnof sed to his Crue,  
My Meney is many, my incomes but few.*

This, as I conceive, explains the Author's meaning; which seems no less seconded by that antient *English* Bard.

*That Gnof, that Grub, of Pesants blude,  
Had store of Goud, yet did no gude.*

Howsoever, we are to suppose him to be a Lodger or Tabler of Scholars and other Artists, for their Chamber and weekly Commons; as he sheweth after.

With him there was dwelling a poor Scholer.

This Poor, hath been an Epithete (it seems) for Scholars in all Ages; but especially for Astrologers, of which profession this Scholar was, who spend so much time upon Experiments and Conclusions, and make such a pudder about *Jacobs Staff*, as they never leave, till they get a Scrip to't, and so make up a beggarly conclusion.

<sup>1</sup> A richē gnof. (l. 2).



If that men asken him in certain houres  
 When the men should have drought or shouers.<sup>1</sup>

He professed certain (but most uncertain) conjectural notions of Weather, and so probably he might, having (as may be supposed) an Almanack in his bones, by the long familiarity he had with his Hostess *Alyson*, the Carpenter's Wife. Howsoever, it may well appear, that albeit he could judiciously prognosticate of seasons, and by turning of the Weather-cock, gather where the wind was: It was but ill wind to him; for it blew him no good.

A chamber he had in that hostelrye,  
 Alone, withouten any companie,  
 Full fetously dight, &c.<sup>2</sup>

Here he describes his Chamber and Furniture; with the privacy he enjoyed, to make his Studies more successfully fortunate, according to that of the Poet,

*To improve their knowledge, those who have desire,  
 Must learn to leave themselves, and to retire.*

Whence we may ground, that retirement is the best means for improvement of knowledge.

And he himself as swete as is the rote  
 Of Licores, or of any Cete wall.<sup>3</sup>

Here he glanceth wittily at the delicacy or effeminate privacy of this Scholar: From whence he descendeth to the too accurate disposing or shelving of his Books, his Augur stones, with other mysterious Appendices of his seldom practis'd Art. Likewise, to his Press or Wardrobe, where his Cloaths were curiously folded, his Table with Stammel, or some other Carpet, neatly covered, with his Psalter, or Instrument of Musick hanging at his Bed-head, to give himself and the Family delightful Melody. This he fits with a Song, to make his Musick more compleat, himself more admir'd, and his Suit by his Hostess better accepted. Thus spun our young Astrologer out his time; thus spent he his coin, the yearly Pension which his Friends allow'd him.

This Carpenter had wedded new a wife.

An unequal Marriage; frosty Age and Youth cannot suit together. This disparity in years, begets a distraction in their affec-

<sup>1</sup> If that men axed him in certein houres (l. 9)

Whan that men sholde have droghte or ellës shoures.

<sup>2</sup> A chambre hadde he in that hostelrye (l. 17)

Allone, with-outen any companye,

Ful fetisly y-dight, &c.

<sup>3</sup> Of licorys, or any cete wale. (l. 21).

tions: Suspicious he is of her youth, and no less conscious of his own debility; both which (like speedy harbingers) make ready way for Jealousie.

He knew not Cato: for his wit was rude,  
That bad men wed his similitude.<sup>1</sup>

This was not only the advice of *Cato*, but both of *Pittacus*, and that Cynick *Diogenes*, who on a time, being solicited by a young man, for his best counsel or advice touching his Marriage, wished him to go forth into the streets, where the very Children would direct him in his choice: Like will to like.

Faire was this yong wife, and therewithall  
As any Weesele her bodie gentle and small.<sup>2</sup>

Here he descants on the beauty of this young Bride.

*So small her Wast, as Nature made small wast.*

So sung our modern Poet, which agrees well with his Description: He compares her body to a Weesele, of all other creatures, smallest, sleakest, and straightest. After this, he goes to describe her Apparel; which suits so well with the artless curiosity of that time, as every Line finds out one native Ornament to grace and beautifie her Attire. Her Seint studded, or Girdle, barred with Silk; her Barm-cloth, or Partlet, as white as morrow milk; her embroidered Smock, her Colere of cole black Silk; the Tapets or Tassels of her white Wolupere, Gorget or Stomacher, suted to the same colour; her fillet of Silk, and set full high.

And sikerly, she had a likerous eie.

The eye is called Love's Dart. A wandring Eye discovers the affection of the heart. It seldom roams abroad, but it either takes, or is taken. What an Index is to a Book, is the Eye to the mind.

Ful small ipulled were her brows two,<sup>3</sup>  
And they were bent, and black as any slo.

The Brow is the Beacon of Fancy. A bent Brow implies a sovereignty or command of Affection. A black brow, constancy of resolution.

She was moch more blisful for to see,  
Then is the new Perigenet tree, &c.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> He knew nat Catoun, for his wit was rude, (l. 41)  
That bad man sholdē wedde his similitude.

<sup>2</sup> Fair was this yongē wyf, and ther-with-al (l. 47)  
As any weesele hir body gent and smal.

<sup>3</sup> Ful smale y-pulled were hir browes two (l. 59).

<sup>4</sup> She was ful more blisful on to see (l. 61)  
Than is the newē pere-jonette tree.



Here he sets forth the Amiability of her person in sundry proper and familiar resemblances; wherein first, he Metonymically compares the cheerfulness of her countenance to the *Peregrine-tree*, for the fruit of that Tree. Secondly, The softness of her Skin, and tenderness of flesh, being that *Euryale* praised in her *Ulysses*, to *Weatherwool*; the Lustre of her complexion to *Danae's Tower*; the clearness of her voice to a *Swallow*; her nimbleness to a *Kid*; the sweetness of her breath to *Braket* or *Methe*, or *Apples* laid in hay; her wantonness to a *Colt*; her goodly proportion and presence, to a *Maste*; her straightness, to a *Bolt*. From these, he descends to such Ornaments as she usually wore; which (no doubt) received more grace from her, than she from them. With a Broch as broad as the Boss of a Buckler, was she adorned; with shoes or Sandals laced: In a word, she was a *Primrose*, a peerless Paragon, a *Pigges nye*, a Bedfellow for any Lord, a Spouse for a good Yeoman. All this is so fully, freely, and familiarly exprest by him, as it shall need no farther illustration.

Now sir, and eft sir, so bifel the caas  
That one day this hend Nicholas  
Fell with this young wife to rage & pley<sup>1</sup>  
While that her husband was at Oseney.

Opportunity is the Bay or Port of Fancy; many storms and billows did this amorous Scholar incessantly suffer; sundry rubs and oppositions did he encounter; before Opportunity wafted him to this long-expected harbour. At *Oseney*; an ancient Abbey, distant scarce half a mile west from *Oxford*; seated in a Vale no less fruitful, than delightful, whose very Bels were formerly famous, in our old English Catches. To this *Oseney* was our Carpenter gone, leaving his Inmate Astronomer at home, to turn over his Books, and try whether the Sign were in *Aries* or no. Much water goes by the Mill, which the Miller little knows on; and some Chips must be cut by the Scholar, which our Carpenter little wots on. To be short, as Fancy cannot endure to be long; Our youthful Boorder boords his amorous Hostess, and that so familiarly, as it requires a Curtain, for the love of Modesty. Passionate are his Enter-breaths; affectionate his Protests; intimate his Love; desperate his Life; if he may not enjoy what he seems only to love, and without which, he desires not any longer to live. But relentless she seems, howsoever she means.

<sup>1</sup> That on a day this hendē Nicholas (l. 86)  
Fell with this yongē wyf to rage and pleye

She said, I woll not kiss thee by my faie,  
 Why let be, quod she, let be Nicholas,  
 Or I woll cry out, harrow and alaas, &c.

True is that Maxim;

*Follow Love, and she will fly you;  
 Fly your Love, and she'll come nigh you.*

How far will some young Wenches seem from taking, when they are most taken? What a weak kind of wrestling they will use? What an easie resistance they will make? What a pattering with their Lips, as if they would cry out?

*But our experienc'd youths do little fear them,  
 For if they cry, they'l cry that none may hear them.*

But quite another course takes this our Nicholas; what he cannot win by a violent Assault, he hopes to obtain by an easie Parley: Nor is he frustrate of his hopes, having prevail'd as he expected.

This Nicholas gan mercy for to crie,  
 And spake so fair, and profered her so fast  
 That she her lobe granted him at last.<sup>1</sup>

Thus argued our Hostess Alysons good Nature, who would not be won by violence, but by a more easie and affectionate temper. She confirms her self his, and swears by *S. Thom. of Rent* (an usual Oath in those daies) that she will be at his command: Provided, that Opportunity prevent all occasion of Jealousie, to which infectious Jaundise her husband was infinitely subject.

Hay thereof care ye nat, quod Nicholas.

Alyson's consent quickens Nicholas conceit: it rests now, that he contrive some plot, that he may with more conveniency branch the Carpenter's Pate. She accords to his device, and gives way to whatsoever he shall work. This, as it was their first amorous encounter, they express their mutual love in Lip-labour, hopeful promises of a succeeding favour: So the Poet observes:

*Who knows not, Lips are gates to those that woo?  
 Which freely ope, grant farther entrance too.*

This Curtsie he requites with a pleasant new Tune on his Psaltery. Thus cheers she his Lip with her Kiss, he, her Ear with his Melody.

Than fell it thus, that to the parish Cherch  
 (Christis own works for to werch)  
 This good wife went on an holy day;<sup>2</sup>  
 Her forhede shone, &c.

<sup>1</sup> That she hir love him graunted atte laste. (l. 104).

<sup>2</sup> Than fil it thus that to the parish-chirche (l. 121)  
 Cristes ownē werkēs for to wirche  
 This godē wyf wentē on an haliday.

Here he turns aside from the former subject he had in hand, and enters into another discourse; wherein, he first tells you of our Hostess repair to the Church; but in so trim and neat a dress, as by all probability she resorts rather to see and be seen, than hear and be taught; for fashion, than devotion: Afterwards, he descends to speak of the beauteous feature, and curious attire of the Parish-Clerk, *Absolon*.

Now was there of the chirch a parish clerke,  
The which that was cleped Absolon,<sup>1</sup>  
Croule was his heer, &c.

In this description he glanceth at the pride of the Clergy; shewing how vanity began to strut within the Walls of a Monastery. For if a poor Parish-Clerk must be so curiously dressed, as to have his hair curled, and so womanishly disheveled, his eyes so effeminately pilled, his shooes artificially carved, and in all points so completely accoutred; what may we think of those, whose Revenues were greater, places higher, and whose persons, in the eye of the world, more popular? Such Poets, these corrupter times require, to tax our Clergy boldly, where such who should be exemplary Practicers and Professors of humility, become too much Admirers of Apish Formality, and too serious followers of these shadows of Vanity.

But such witty Evasions have some of these, as I never see any of them, but they put me in mind of the pregnant and present Answer of that *Sprusado* to a *Judge* in this Kingdom, a rigid Censor of mens habits; who seeing a neat Finical Divine come before him in a Cloak lined through with *Plush*, thus encountered him: Sir, *You never read that Paul ever went in a Plush Cloak. But I read, My Lord*, said he, *that Paul left his Cloak at Troas, and whether that Cloak was lined through with Plush, or no, it is more (my word) than either you or I know.*

For to point at some of these both in *Diet* and *Habit*; in stead of *Locusts* and *Wild Honey*, they must (good men) content themselves with *Lobsters*, *Cramm'd Capons*, and *Coney*; and for *Raiments* of *Camels hair*, *Damask Cassocks* down to their heels; and for *Leathern Girdles* about their *Loyns*, *Formal Fashes*, or *Apostolical*, *Canonical Roses*, to enamour their *Loves*; with *Downie Cushions* for their knees, in their rare, short and sweet *Orisons* to their Lord:

<sup>1</sup> Now was ther of that chirche a parish-clerk (l. 126)  
The which that was y-cleped Absolon.

But too tedious are such tasks for fat bellies. We will go on with our Tale.

A merry child he was, so God me save,  
 Well coud he let blood, clip, and shabe,<sup>1</sup>  
 En twenty manner coud he trip & daunce.

An excellent description of a Parish Clark; it seems he was a jovial boy; and lest his too loose or irregular conversation might bring him to a deprivation, and so exclude him from the benefit of his Profession, he initiates himself sufficiently in other Trades: He can play the Barber-surgeon, in cases of necessity; and keep a dancing School to shew feats of his activity; he can play the Musician too, and make Taverns and Tap-houses resound with his melody.

This Absolon, that was joly and gaie,  
 Goeth with a Censer on a Sundaie,  
 Censyng the wives of the parish faste  
 And many a lobely look on hem he cast,  
 And namely on this Carpenters wife, &c.<sup>2</sup>

A fit person for such a personal employment: He carries a Censer for *Cupid's* Altar. Many Objects he eies; sundry amiable presentments he views; yet comparing them with this matchless *Alyson*, he holds them all inferiour beauties below comparison.

And Absolon his Geterne had itake  
 For Paramours he thought for to wake,  
 And forth he gooth jolly and amorous  
 Till he came to the Carpenters hous.<sup>3</sup>

Long and tedious had this task been to *Absolon*, had he bestow'd it upon his devotion. Love's watchful eyes may be properly compared to those three *Hesperian* Sisters; their Portels are never closed, but ever vigilant to prevent an intrusive Rival. Now are we to suppose him mounting the Carpenter's Wall, where, directly under the beauteous *Alyson's* window, who lay closely locked in the unweldy arms of her jealous husband: He chants out some amorous Roundelay, to which he tunes his melodious Gittern. Long had he

<sup>1</sup> Wel coude he laten blood and clippe and shave. (l. 140)

<sup>2</sup> This Absolon, that jolif was and gay (l. 153)  
 Gooth with a sencer on the haliday,

And namely on this carpentérës wyf.

<sup>3</sup> And Absolon his giterne hath y-take, (l. 167)  
 For paramours, he thoghtë for to wake.  
 And forth he gooth, jolif and amorous,  
 Til he cam to the carpentérës hous.



not warbled in this manner, till the Carpenter awakes out of his Leaden slumber.

This Carpenter awoke, and heard him sing,  
And spake unto his wife, and said anon  
That Alyson, heres thou not Absolon, &c.

Hourly fears, daily frights, and incessant cares beget broken sleeps, short rests, and disquiet dreams. The Carpenter's head lay on so hard a pillow, being, as he thought, stuff with horn-shavings, as his sleeps could not be long. He awakes his *Alyson*, who, perhaps, was awake before he call'd her.

And she answered her husband therewithal,  
Des God wote John, I here it every dele.

Notably did he express the effects of Fancy, who sung thus ;

*Th' Effects of pow'rful love, do best appear,  
When passion feeds the Eye, and fills the Ear.*

How our *Alyson's* affection was seated, or her senses sated, might hence be probably gathered : Like a second *Dulcinea*, she seeming slept, but did not sleep ; heard, yet would not hear. A favourable Gloss would interpret thus : She was loath to disquiet her diseased husband, or put a disgrace on this amorous Clark ; this (as may be well imagined) begot in her a resolved silence. Nor will *Absolon*, though he receive small comfort in his suit, omit the least opportunity for *Alyson's* sake. He wooeth her incessantly, walks all the night long constantly, kembs his Locks curiously, price and prayer intercede for him powerfully, he vows to become her servant (in those daies a rare kind of Complement) he quavers in his musical Aires melodiously, he sends her Pymment, Methe, Wafers, and choicest Spices, to win her love with presents of delicacy ; he shews her proofs of his Activity, and in Theatral actions personates *Herod* in his Majesty.

But what availeth him, as in this caas  
She lobed so, this hendē Nicholas  
That Absolon may blow the Bucks horne &c.<sup>1</sup>

All his labour is but in vain ; fruitless are all these tasks ; to no purpose his late watchings. These are but as if he striv'd to make the Blackamore white : This our Poet confirms with an usual Proverb in those daies.

<sup>1</sup> She loveth so this hendē Nicholas, (l. 200)  
That Absolon may blowe the bukkes horn.

Full sooth is this Proverb, it is no lye,  
Men say right thus, alway the night flie  
Maketh the ferre leafe.<sup>1</sup>

As if he should say, Daily company passeth holiday love. *Absolon* hath too strong a Corival of *Nicholas*, to prevail in his purchase. Long familiarity strengthened with domestick acquaintance, hath so firmly cemented their affections, as all this trim Clark's Rhetorick cannot dissolve it. Now is it high time for them to address themselves for their project.

And so bifell it on a Saterdaie  
This Carpenter was gone to Osnaie.<sup>2</sup>

It may seem that he was Carpenter to the Abbey, by his usual resort thither: as sundry other Artificers were constantly retained, and by a yearly Pension tied, to repair any such ruines or decaies, as casually befel in the Abbey.

This *Nicholas* no lenger would tarie,  
But doeth full soft unto his chamber carie  
Both meat and drink &c.

*Nicholas* becomes his own Purveior, and has now betaken himself to his Chamber, to devise some plot to deceive the Carpenter, and possess him of his dearest Paramour. Private he must be, and retired, and as one with an extasie surprized, lie gaping as if he were Planet-struck. Directions to this purpose are given to his *Alyson*, that the Plot may draw on to a fairer conclusion. All *Saturday* *Nicholas* mues himself up in his Chamber, where he bestows the day in his repast or repose; and so continues on in this his pleasant restraint till *Sunday* night: Which long restraint of *Nicholas* Liberty, drives our simple Carpenter into a marvellous perplexity.

This selie Carpenter hath great merbeile  
Of *Nicholas*, or what thing might him eile,  
And saied: I am a drad by *S. Thomas*  
Et stondeth not aright with *Nicholas*.

He is now grown as jealous of *Nicholas* life, as he was before of his *Alyson's* Love. First, By falling into consideration of Man's frailty, he fears that he died suddenly: And this he holds more probable, by recalling to mind a Spectacle of Mortality which he had lately seen.

<sup>1</sup> Men seyn right thus, 'alwey the nyë slyë (l. 206)  
Maketh the ferrë levë to be looth.'

<sup>2</sup> This Carpenter was goon til Osënay. (l. 214).



I saw to day a corse born to cherche<sup>1</sup>  
That now on monday last I saw him werche.

This confirms him in his fear: Longer he will not debate the matter; forthwith he must be resolv'd what is become of *Nicholas*, of whose safety he becomes so suspicious. One then must be directed, and sent to his Chamber, to see what is acted.

Go up (qd he unto his knabe) anone  
Cleape at his dore, & knock fast with a stone.<sup>2</sup>

On goes this rude Usher, to observe his Master's command: He cries shrilly, knocks stoutly, presseth him to answer boldly; but *Nicholas*, as one taken with a Fit of Astrology, resolves him with silence. At last, lest he should leave his Master still in suspense, and so procure his displeasure, he seeks about till he finds an hole or passage, where a Cat us'd to creep in; where he pries like a Cat for a Mouse.

Till at the last he had of him a sight,  
This *Nicholas* sate gaping ever upright,  
As he had keyked on the new mone.<sup>3</sup>

Here plays *Nicholas* the part of a profound Astronomer; and h'as one trick above *Ela*, wherein none of all his fellow-consorts or Astronomical Professants can ever come near him: For he by help of his prospective glass, can distinctly and apparently discover all the starry Regiment quite through the Roof of his Chamber. Howsoever, doubtless he gazes for some preferment, or else to make an Asterisme of his mouth, where some Constellation or other may certainly fix. This could not chuse but beget a wonderful amazement in this pitiful Spy.

Adowne he goeth, & tolde his maister sone  
In what aray he saw this ylke man.

This increased the number of his distracted fears, as may appear by the sequel: for presently upon return of this sad relation,

This Carpenter to blissen him began  
And said: now helpe us seynt *Frideswide*.<sup>4</sup>

A Saint in those daies usually invoked, when any one was either blasted, bewitched, or by a spirit haunted. Divers are his conceipts of *Nicholas*; sometimes he thinks that his much study hath made him mad; other sometimes, that he labours of some other Malady,

<sup>1</sup> I saugh to-day a cors y-born to chirche. (l. 243)

<sup>2</sup> Clepe at his dore, or knocke with a stoon. (l. 246)

<sup>3</sup> As he had kyked on the newe mone (l. 259)

<sup>4</sup> And seyde, 'help us, seintē Frideswyde!' (l. 263)

& that now he is struck into a dangerous Extasie, which requires some present remedy. Amidst these various doubts and distempered fears, far more wisely than could be well expected from the conceit of such an Head-piece, he imputes the cause of this distemper to his too curious search or enquiry after Gods Secrets.

I thought aye well how it should be,  
Men shoulde[n] not know of Gods privete &c.<sup>1</sup>

This he confirms with a late Accident.

Right so fer'de another clerk with astronomy,  
He walked into the feldes for to pry  
Upon the sterre, to wete what should befall,  
Till he was in a marlpit yfall.<sup>2</sup>

*Columella* observes, that man of all other Creatures, hath one Musc[e] to erect his Eye upward, whereas others are depressed, and haied downward; yet this was not given him to eye that which is concealed from him. We are so to admire the Creature, as in it we adore the Creator: We are so to bestow the Eye of our outward man, as we darken not our inward light: For by fixing our Eyes too intently on Objects of Secrecy, we may justly fear, lest we should be consumed by the Beams of his Glory. It is a good Lesson which that Sage so seriously recommended to his Scholars: *Be not wise overmuch; lest ye become ignorant in that which you should know most.* But little needed our Carpenter fear the depth of study in his Astronomer. A better course therefore he resolves of; and that is to cudgel him out of his humor, and so cure this threatening distemper.

Get me a staffe.

Madness must be cured by Correction, and spare Diet. Spare, did the Carpenter think, were *Nicholas's* Commons; albeit, he had better provision in his Knap-sack, than he knew of. He means therefore to correct his humour on the one side with Bombasting, as the Patient on the other side had practised on himself by Fasting.

He shall out of his studieng, as I gesse,  
And to the chamber dore he gan him dresse.

Though *Nicholas* might justly commence an action of forcible Entry against his unruly Host, where he was Farmer, during the

<sup>1</sup> I thoghte ay wel how that it sholdē be! (l. 267)  
Men sholdē nat knowē of goddēs privetee.

<sup>2</sup> So ferde another clerk with astromyē; (l. 271)  
He walked in the feeldēs for to pryē  
Up-on the sterres, what ther sholdē bifalle,  
Til he was in a marlē-pit y-falle.

Lease of his Chamber; seeing his door raised from the Hasps, his deep studies disturbed, his Astronomical slumber disquieted, and all things topsie-turvy turned, yet would not he budge a foot, but like one made up in Wainscot,

**This Nicholas sate as still as any stone,  
And ever gaped upward into the eire &c.<sup>1</sup>**

This troubles *John* Carpenter more than all the rest; who verily thinks that he is either fallen into despair, and therefore, like a discreet Monitor, puts him in remembrance of some devout meditation, by awaking him from that Lethargy or amazed distraction. Or else, that he is forespoken, or blasted by some ill Spirit, which makes him use his Charm to cure this mischance.

**I crouch the from elves, & from wicked wights;  
Therewith the night spell he said anon rights,  
On four halbes of the house about,  
And on the dreshfold of the dore without.<sup>2</sup>**

Here he repeats the Night-charm used in those daies, when they shut their doors at night, and opened them in the morning: Confirmed by that old *Sylvane Charm*,

*Fawns and Fairies keep away,  
While we in these Coverts stay;  
Goblins, Elves, of Oberon's Train,  
Never in these Plains remain,  
Till I and my Nymph awake,  
And do hence our Journey take,  
May the Night-mare never ride us,  
Nor a fright by night betide us:  
So shall Heav'ns praise sound as clear,  
As the shrill voyc'd Chantecleer.*

Scarcely could *Nicholas* keep his countenance, when he heard the Carpenter run so glib with his Spels: But having indented with his Face, not to blush, with his Eye, to look up, and his Tongue, to be mute; with a constant boldness, a fixt amazedness, and a resolved silence, he performs his Plot, that at night he may enjoy his Place.

**And at the last this hende Nicholas  
Can for to sike sore, and sain alas,  
Shall all this world be lost?**

<sup>1</sup> This Nicholas sat ay as stille as stoon, (l. 286)  
And ever gaped upward in-to the eir.

<sup>2</sup> I crouchē thee from elvës and fro wightës! (l. 293)  
Ther-with the night-spel seyde he anon-rightës.  
On fourë halvës of the hous aboute,  
And on the threshfold of the dore withoute.

Now is *Nicholas* awak'd out of his Trance, and to the Carpenter's great grief, discovers what he has seen in his Astronomical Dream. Which, at first, his Host seems to slight, wishing him to think on God.

This *Nicholas* answered, fetch me drinke,  
And after woll I speke in pribete  
Of certain things, that toucheth the and me.<sup>1</sup>

Though *Nicholas's* Vision was moist, his mouth was dry; down goes the Carpenter to quench the Astronomer's thirst; and now returning with a large Quart of mighty Ale, that might compare with *Stingo*, for it would cut a Feather, they toss'd the Cannikin lovingly one to another: Which done, and having set the Carpenter by him, *Nicholas* begins; yet before he has well entred into his sad Story, the door being first shut, he solemnly swears his Host to keep counsel in a secrecy of such high consequence; for should he discover what he imparted, his light discovery would be throughly revenged.

Nay Christ it forbid for his holy bloode,  
Qd tho this sely man, I am no blabbe &c.<sup>2</sup>

Now he begins to give better ear to this heavy relation; and vows to be secret, upon any condition.

Now John (qd *Nicholas*) I woll not lye  
I have yfounden in mine Astrologye &c.<sup>3</sup>

A deep red Youth, and such an one as will not stick to belie his knowledge, rather than want Admirers. Amongst those then may he be well numbred, who pretend a familiar knowledge to all the Houses of Heaven, and yet can scarce pay house-rent for their own. See how his Banks overflow! He discovers the time of this dangerous Deluge to a minute. The Rain which fell at *Noah's* Flood, was but an *April* shower to this Inundation: Within one hour must the whole World be drowned, only those few saved, which by his rare and mysterious Art are preserved. The weakly-credulous Carpenter believes him; having never seen the Bow in the Cloudes, or never heard for what Token of Covenant it was given.

<sup>1</sup> This *Nicholas* answerdē, 'fecche me drinke; (l. 306)

And after wol I speke in pribete  
Of certyn thing that toucheth me & thec.'

<sup>2</sup> Nay, Crist forbede it, for his holy blood! (l. 322)

Quod tho this sely man, 'I nam no labbe' (Ellesmere).

<sup>3</sup> I have y-founde in myn astrologye. (l. 328)



Thus shall mankind drenche, and lese her life,  
This carpenter answered and said, alas my wife!<sup>1</sup>  
And shall she drenche? Alas mine Alyson &c.

There is nothing perplexeth him so much as the loss of his dear *Alyson*. Pity it were, thinks he, that so pretty a Morsel of flesh should go the way of all Fish. So as never till now begins he to provide for his own safety, Wife, and Family.

— Is there no remedy in this caas?

As if he should say, Alas, my learned Guest *Nicholas*, must we be all meat for Haddocks? No remedy? no means of safety? 'Las, for my self I care not so much; for I have the one foot i' th grave already; I am not a man long for this world: But that my *Alyson*, who is in the very flower and prime of her time, the very Daisie and Honey-suckle of her time, that she should become Provender for a Sea-horse, or lodge in the Guts of a Whale, it would make any ones heart yern within him, that has any man's blood in him. Besides, for her Age, she may have many pretty Chips when I am gone. O then, good Guest *Nicholas*, provide for her safety, if not for mine. Who knows not, but if you two can agree, she may be meat for you, when I am Worms-meat. Thus might the poor Carpenter seem to have expostulated with his learned Astronomer; as one desirous to receive some small comfort from this profound Artist, which might minister a remedy in cases of such urgent necessity: and afford to his *Alyson* (whom he preferred before all his Family) some promising hopes of safety.

Is there no remedy?

Yes, yes, full good (qd hende *Nicholas*)<sup>2</sup>

Now begins he to lay his Limè-twigs more cunningly: He gives the deluded Carpenter directions how to prevent this imminent danger: He repeats unto him the story of *Noah's* deliverance. Nothing is to be undertaken rashly, without serious advice and deliberation; yet in regard both of the apparency and imminency of that danger, he adviseth him to take some speedy course, that the peril may be seasonably prevented, and their safeties procured.

This asketh hast, and of an hasty thing  
Men may not preche, ne make taryng;<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thus shal mankyndē drenche and lese hir lyf.' (l. 335)

This Carpenter answerde, 'allas my wyf!'

<sup>2</sup> 'Why yis, for gode,' quod hende *Nicholas*. (l. 340)

<sup>3</sup> Men may nat preche or maken taryng. (l. 360)



Anou go get us fast into this inne  
 A kneding trow, or else a kemelin,  
 For ech of us.

Here must the Carpenter be sent his Errand : He must provide Materials for his security. Though every Tub be to stand upon his own bottom, every one must not strike on his own Tub. Thus is this Carpenter appointed to become Purveyor against this great Deluge. And Love makes all tasks light ; for, not the fear of death, but the Love of his dear *Alyson*, which he preferred before his own life, quickens his wind-gall'd feet, to prevent all occasion of fear. But this dark and mysterious Artist *Nicholas*, adviseth him withal, that in no case he discover this secrecie, either to his man *Robin*, or his maid *Gille* ; for they are barred by name from all hope of safety : Neither is it fitting that he should be too inquisitive touching Gods privacies, touching the preservation of some, and subversion of others. Let it suffice him, that these means are provided for the deliverance of himself and his *Alyson*.

Go now thy way.

The Troughs now are to be provided, and sufficiently victualled, with Hatchets to cut them down from the roof where they are to be tied, when the Flood hath once entred. A passage too must be made for these marvellous Barges through the main Wall into the Garden.

Than shalt thou swim as mery I undertake  
 As doeth the white ducke after her drake.

A proper and familiar comparison. Two especial inducements there were which moved this careful Carpenter to address him to his laborious Task : The first was, Security. The Second, Sovereignty.

*Light is that Labour which may safety bring,  
 In doubtful acts, fear's an ingenious thing.*

That the Carpenter likewise aspired to Sovereignty, might be probably gathered by that comfortable hope of an universal Monarchy, which *Nicholas* suggested to him.

And than we shall be Cordes all our life  
 Of all the world, as was Noe and his wife.<sup>1</sup>

This sets the Carpenter upon his Pantofles ; while the Learned Clerk *Nicholas* adviseth him by all means, that when every one is

<sup>1</sup> And than shul we be lordes al our lyf (l. 395)  
 Of al the world, as Noë and his wyf.

to enter into their Roof-trough or Kimelyn, none speak one to another, but with a constant and reserved silence remain as still as the Night. *John* must not speak to his *Alyson*, nor *Alyson* to her *John*. Besides, these Kneading Tubs must be divided by equal distance one from another. Thus is the Plot contrived, and no less successsefully continued. The Carpenter's Credulity promiseth a fair issue to this Torrent of Astronomy.

This ordinaunce is said, go god the speed,  
To morow at night, whan men ben all a slepe,  
Ento our kneding tubbs woll we creep.<sup>1</sup>

Love will creep where it cannot go. Dark and straight is that Crany, through which Love cannot find out a way. By this, you may collect, how the Carpenter hath his Commission sealed, his Passport granted, and all things facilitated for so terrible an Occurrent.

This sely carpenter goth forth his way  
Full ofte he said alas, and welaway,  
And to his wife he told his privete,  
And she was ware, and knew it bet than he.

Notwithstanding his great hast, he will take so much time, as to impart this Secrecy to his dearest *Alyson*; who, as she was known to the Plot, conjures him by all those Professions of Love which he had ever vow'd her, to follow the Advice of their Learned Guest: She cunningly aggravates all those seeming occasions of Fear, which wrought strongly enough already on the Carpenter's Imagination, so as it little needed any re-impression.

This sely carpenter beginneth to quake,  
Him thinketh verily that he may se  
Noes flodde come waltring as the see &c.<sup>2</sup>

Such strange effects works a possessed fear. He considers not the improbability of this Relation, but seemingly apprehends the present approach of this Fanatical Deluge, with all those menacing dangers which accompany it: Yet must not this fear foreslow, but accelerate his dispatch. The three Tubs are provided, Victuals purveyed, and these necessary Store-houses in the Roof reared. Besides, that all things might be with more secrecy carried, *Robin* and *Gylle* are removed, and to *London* upon a sleeveless Errand directed.

<sup>1</sup> Tomorwe at night, whan men ben alle aslepe, (l. 407)  
In-to our kneding-tubbës wol we crepe.

<sup>2</sup> This sely carpenter beginneth quake; (l. 428)  
Him thinketh verraily that he may see  
Noës flood come walwing as the see.

And on the mondy, whan it drow to night,  
 He shette his doore, without candel light,<sup>1</sup>  
 And dressed all thing, as it should be  
 And shortly clomben up all thre.

He had purposely fixed sundry Rings or wooden Pins, by which, as by stairs or stalks, they might climb into their Tubs: Where, with a constant and continued silence, they lay closely immured; while the Carpenter lay trembling and shaking, hourly expecting this fearful Inundation: But *Nicholas* and *Alyson* ever thirsting and longing for the Carpenter's good rest, that with the active joyes of Love they might seal their Affection. The Carpenter applies himself to his Devotion, as if he and all the world were near their dissolution; But these two amorous souls pray for nothing more, than his rest, and their recreation.

The deed slepe, for wery besinesse<sup>2</sup>  
 Fel on this carpenter, right as I gesse  
 About curfewe time.

The many employments to which this Carpenter stood engaged, had with a various Medley of Cares and Fears so overwearied him, that as one now resolved to sleep out that small scantling of time which is left him, about Cock-crow he bids a silent good-night to Learned *Nicholas*, and Lovely *Alyson*.

*Love's eyes are open, and can take no sleep,  
 While aged Eyes their Leaden Slumber keep.*

Which security gives them opportunity; He snorts not so fast in his Tub, but they hast as fast to leave their Tubs, and go to bed.

And down of the ladder than stalketh *Nicolay*,<sup>3</sup>  
 And *Alyson* full softe after she spedde,  
 Without words mo, they went to bedde.

As this Feat was by both equally plotted, so are they now in the conclusion mutually pleased. The Carpenter's Age enjoyes more rest than their youth. Let night's sable Curtain enscreen these dark actions. Lust's Palace hath but very few minutes of contenting

<sup>1</sup> He shette his dore with-outē candel-light, (l. 448)  
 And dressed al thing as it sholdē be—  
 And shortly, up they clomben allē thre.

<sup>2</sup> The dedē sleep, for wery besinesse, (l. 457)  
 Fel on this carpenter right, as I gesse,  
 Aboutē corfewe-tyme.

<sup>3</sup> Down of the ladder stalketh *Nicholay*, (l. 462)  
 And *Alisoun*, ful softe adoun she spedde;  
 With-uten wordēs mo, they goon to bedde.

solace. They may sate Sense for a time, but never satisfie Reason with an inhibited touch. We are now to retire a little from this Discourse, and descend to our love-enthralled *Absolon*, who desires nothing more, and hopes to deserve nothing less, than to enjoy fair *Alyson's* Love : To whom he addresseth his course.

This parish clerke, this amarus *Absolon*  
That is for love alway for wo begon  
Upon the monday was at *Osenay*  
With company, him to disporte and play.

If God have his Church, the Devil will have his Chappel; yea and his Chaplain too. *Absolon* repairs to the Abbey of *Osenay*, where he employs the day, not in Devotion, but in a serious inquisition after *John* the Carpenter, and his beloved *Alyson*. Private conference he hath with a Cloysterer, in whose relation he conceives infinite pleasure. For by his means he receives Intelligence of the Carpenter's absence from home : Which opportunity chalkes out a seasonable time for *Absolon's* Jubilee.

Some maner comfort shall I have parfay  
My mouth hath itched all this long daie<sup>1</sup>  
That is a signe of kissinge at the leest  
All night me mette eke, that I was at a feest  
Therefore I woll go slepe an hour or twey  
And al the night then woll I walke and pley.

He conjectures by the itching of his mouth, that he shall be graced at least with a Kiss ; which prediction he found most true, as you shall read in the Tale hereafter. It is most certain, what the Comedian sometimes wittily observed : *We dream by night what we most think of by day*. This youthful Quirister meditated of nothing so much all the day long, as of Kissing Comfits, and luscious Feastings. And these were the Subjects of his Dreams. In the amorous discoursing and discussing whereof, he sets this up for his Rest : He will go sleep an hour or two, that he may more ably turn Night-walker, or more properly, Eave-dropper. For *Alyson's* Chamber-window must be his *Rendesvouz* ; where he resolves to sing his Apocryphal Catches.

<sup>1</sup> My mouth hath icched al this longē day ; (l. 496)

Al night me mette eek, I was at a feste— (l. 498)

And al the night than wol I wake and pleye.' (l. 500).



Whan that the first cocke hath crow anon<sup>1</sup>  
Up riste this joly lover Absolon.

He sleeps not his business. And to make himself better accepted, at poynt-debise must his Body be attired; his Breath, to cure all rankeness, must be with Cloves, Granates, and Lycorice sweetned; his hair daintily trimmed and tressed, under his Tongue a true-lobe Flower couched, to make his Designs more auspicious, himself to his Love more gracious. Up to the Carpenter's house he hyeth, where he stayeth, and sueth.

What do ye honnycombe, swete Alyssoun?  
My fayre birde, my swete sinamome.

How this dapper youth melts with Love! His amorous Oration is all Honey and Cynamon: He cals her his Honey-comb, and she makes him her Coxcomb. Then he descends to speak of that uncessant anguish of mind that he suffers. Like a Lamb after his Dam goes he bleating; like a Turtle for his Mate waits he mourning: as a Maid without meat sits he fasting; yet for all this, like a Calf she discards him.

Go fro the window, Jack foole, she said,  
As helpe me god, and swete saint Jame<sup>2</sup>  
I lobe another, or els I were to blame  
Well bet than the (by Jesu) Absolon  
Go forthe thy way, or I woll cast a stone.

This sweet Cynamon Clark is properly rewarded; she vows to stone him, quite contrary to his expectance. She prefers the Stars before the Quire. Her *Nicholas* she enwreaths and enjoys; mean time let the poor Quirister chant his humming Catch to the Seven Stars: Let him cool his Toes in Moonshine, while she is rid of him she loaths, and enjoys him she loves. Yet, lest *Absolon* should be numbred among those weak wooers, who relinquish their Suit upon the first repulse, he rears his Battery, though with a more easie sollicitancy, than he did at first.

Alas qd Absolon, and welaway  
That true love was ever so pnel bysette  
Than kisse me, sin it may be no bet &c.

He remembers, it seems, the presage of his itching lips; the height of his amorous Ambition is now confin'd to a Kiss. All his

<sup>1</sup> Whan that the firste cok hath crowe, anon (l. 501).

<sup>2</sup> Go fro the wyndow, Jakkē fool, she sayde (l. 522)

As help me god it wol nat be com pa me (Ellesmere)

(As help me god it wol not be companie) (Harleian 7334).



Night-labour is now brought to Lip-labour. Which Suit our beauteous *Alyson*, in meer compassion, rather than any affection to his person, thus answers,

Wilt thou than go thy way therwith qd she?  
He certes lemmen, qd this *Absolon*.

Small favours would not be neglected, because they may be Introductions to higher Curtsies when occasion is offered. Mean time *Absolon* prepares his Cynamon mouth for a tast of an unsavoury Curtsie. He takes his corporal Oath of his constant fidelity, and makes *Alyson's* *Posteriora's* the Book he swears by. Whence observe, with what intollerable petulancy she jeers the poor Cloys-terer! All this while, you may imagine, *Nicholas* slept not; but heard this untoward Dialogue, after his long wished, wooed, and now enjoyed amorous encoun[t]er. To whom she imparts her Plot, which he approves, and she effects.

The window she undoth, and that in haste<sup>1</sup>  
Have do (qd she) and spede the fast  
Lest not our neighbours thee espy.  
This *Absolon* gan wipe his mouth full drie

A civil preparation for an uncivil salutation. Now at last he perceives how something ever hath some favour: but small sweetness tasts he in her too low curtsie, under favour.

Abacke he sterte, and thought it was amis.

His Experience had inform'd him sufficiently in the knowledge of a Woman's Lip: This had not that smoothness which he expected. Yet (quoth he) I may be deceiv'd. Dame *Alyson* may have an hair-lip, for ought that I know: While he thus expostulated the case,

Te he qd she, and clapt the window to

Te he, a word of disgrace, scorn, or contempt: She laughs at him after she had galled him: Before she shut the window to, had she shut her back-door too, *Absolon* had receiv'd the greater Curtsie, and she exprest the more Civility. But being thus, not only rejected, but disgraced;

*Absolon* goeth forth a sory paas  
A berde, a berde, said hende *Nicholas*.

*Nicholas* has a fine world on't; his Host is incaged, his Hostess

<sup>1</sup> 'Have do,' quod she, 'com of, & speed thee faste, (l. 542)  
Lest that our neighëborës thee espyë.'

in his arms inclosed, his Corriual discarded, and new conceits arising, other contents hourly devised.

*This self Absolon herde it every dele  
And on his lippe he gan for angre bite  
And to himselfe he said, I shall the quite*

The Worm will turn again. Poor *Absolon* thus abused, of his sleep deprived, casts about in his mind how he may be revenged. He cannot endure to sit down with this wrong: his Fancy is now changed into a Frenzy; his Love to Revenge. Many had he serv'd, yet was he never so answered; many had he lov'd, yet never so rewarded; many had he kist, yet never any Lip that so relished. His Passion in the end works it self into a vertuous compassion.

*For he was healed of his maladye  
Full ofte Paramours he gan deffe  
And wepe as doth a childe that is ybete.*

What rare Effects will the apprehension of a conceived disgrace produce? First, It dictates of revenge; then it begets an inbred hate to the Object before loved, and by whom the disgrace was occasioned: After all this, it resolves into tears, till opportunity be offered, that the intended revenge may be inflicted.

*A softe pace he went ober the strete  
Unto a smith men callen dan Gerbeys &c.*

*Absolon* having received such rough entertainment in *Venus* Court, flies for revenge to *Vulcan's* Forge: Where he beats his Brain intollerably, about the manner of his Revenge. Stronger is his desire, than his conceit; yet becomes that so quickned by passion, as now he assaies to execute, what his doubtful Imagination hath so many several waies projected. His Pate is his Anvile, the Forge his Study; so as, I may properly apply those antient Verses, upon this occasion, to our Truant Chantery-man.

*That Scholar well deserves a Widdie,  
Who makes his Study of a Smiddie.*

Well; Suppose him now cooling his Toes at the Blacksmith's door, as he had done before to his dainty Paramour. Thus flies he for refuge to this *Temutian*, to be revenged on his *Temman*: True it is;

*When Vulcan and the Muses meet,  
Safely may Mars warm Venus Feet.*

But secure is *Gervase* of any such Overture.

This Absolon knocketh all easily  
And said undo Gerbase &c.

He knocks easily, lest he should be discovered, and consequently his plotted Revenge defeated; or else, that he should not for a Night-walker be publickly noted.

What who art thou?

Smug the Smith, it seems, was at work; or else of a light sleep.

Et am I Absolon.

This he utters softly through a Cranny, lest it should come to discovery.

What Absalon,  
— Sum gay gyrlȝ god it wote  
Hath brought you thus.

It seems this Chanterer was a notable Tarrier; and generally observed for an inordinate walker. But little cares *Absolon* for this aspersion: He had more Tow on his Distaffe. His head was otherwise employed; his Brain otherwise exercised. Revenge was his dearest Minion, which he preferred before the Embrace of a Wanton.

— Frend so dere  
The hote cultre, in the chymney here  
As lebe it me,

The Smith of antient acquaintance, would be loath to deny him so ordinary a Curtsie: were it of Gold, or nobles in a Bag, he would lend it him: Albeit, he wonders what employment he may have for it at so unseasonable a time; but he receives it, upon promise to return it, with relation next morning how he did employ it.

And caught the culter by the cold stele  
Full softe out at the dore gan he stele.<sup>1</sup>

Now he renews his siege with Fire and Faggot: Up to the Carpenter's wall he mounteth, and at *Alyson's* window he knocketh. She, who lay waking, as one fearful of her own security, or doubtful of her Husband's Jealousie, or over-joy'd with *Nicholas's* sweet Company, answers him presently, but timorously, as if he were some Thief; while he, to free her from that suspition, and make better way to his intended revenge, shapes her this Reply.

I am thy Absolon, thy own derling  
Of golde (qd he) I have the brought a ring.

<sup>1</sup> And caughte the culter by the coldē stele. (l. 599)  
Ful softe out at the dore he gan to stele

A modern Poet sometimes Sung :

*There's nought a young man can devise,  
Will tempt a Woman more than prize.*

Upon which grounds builds he his project ; He tenders her a Ring which his own Mother (*Eris* Mother of Revenge) bequeathed him, and that curiously Engraven, and this will he give, so far he seems surpriz'd with love for one poor kiss. *Nicholas* is risen, and he will have it, and as uncivilly requite him for it. For, thought he, shall mine Hostess exceed me in conceit? she put a palpable disgrace upon him, and I will do the like.

And ope the window did he hastily &c.

Here our Astronomer lyes his Level, and dischargeth his shot with a powder ; while our Chanterer is prepared with his red hot Cultre.

And he was redy with his pron hote  
And *Nicholas* in the arse he smote,<sup>1</sup>

He has got a Ring with a witness. Lust must ever have a rue rub. He who even now, so lasciviously wantonned, and so freely tasted delights prohibited ; he who surfetted in pleasures, and had hung up his abused Host for a Scare-crow, see how he is scarrified !

Of goeth the skin an hondbrede about<sup>2</sup>  
The hotte cultor brende so his toute.

Here's a Plaister for his pleasure. He that tastes the Sweet, must have the Sowr we'te. He rageth, raveth, and roareth like another *Oetean Hercules*. He can rest in no place, so sharp is his Inflammation ; he can repose in no place, so deep is his Incision ; So small is the Solace he now conceives in his *Alyson*.

Helpe, water, water, for goddes hert.<sup>3</sup>  
This carpenter out of his slumber sterte.

What this deep Soothsayer prediction'd before in jest, he now calls for in earnest. Little dream'd he, when he foretold of that general inundation, that he should stand in need of some of it to cool his inflammation. But no sooner had he sent forth this pittiful clamour, than the poor Carpenter, who lay snorting all this while in his suspended Trough, and had taken more rest though less pleasure, than his Guest, began to rouse himself out of his slumber ; and fearing the imminency of danger, with his axe he smites the

<sup>1</sup> And *Nicholas* amidde the ers he smoot (l. 624).

<sup>2</sup> Of gooth the skin an hande-brede aboute (l. 625)

<sup>3</sup> Help! water! water! help . for goddës herte ! (l. 629).



Cord in two, by which his kimelin or Tub was tyed; that so he might by a passage purposely made through his Garden slice the depths, and so lanch into the Main Ocean.

And down goeth all.

Down goes the Carpenter, down goes Tarboord, Larboord, Ship, Tackling, and all his Provision.

—Till he came to the Cell  
Upon the flore, and there a swonne he lay  
Up stert than Alison and Hend Nicholas.<sup>1</sup>

He never left tumbling till he came to the Cellar floor; and now senseless, what with the Fall, and what with fear; he lies in a Swoun. This Fall from his Roost, frights them from their Rest. This unexpected accident rouseth and raiseth fair *Alyson* and her unfortunate *Nicholas*; who (as may be supposed) might walk in his Shirt, for any rest he could take, since his late Lecture read him on his *Posteriora's*; yea, and one who stood in more need of a Plaister, than any such Panick Distemper. But need makes the old wife trot. Some Plot must they devise or other, or they stand disgraced for ever. With joynt consent therefore, they raise a clamour in the streets, call their Neighbours together, to view this doleful Spectacle of a distracted Carpenter: for all must be imputed to his distemper.

The neighbours, both small and grete  
En ronne—<sup>2</sup>

It is the condition of Common people to press into the view of such Novels, be they never so disastrous. Yea, we shall observe how the most contemptible wretch, who before was never eyed, if he chance to be wounded in the Street, with what numbers of vulgar Spectators he becomes forthwith enclosed: So attentive be their Ears, so intentive their Eyes to become Nuntio's of others miseries. Here then you may suppose this Common Rout standing in a Ring or Circle, gazing and admiring the unfortunately-deluded Carpenter like a blind point in the midst of a Centre, weakly languishing: while this rustick and uncivilized fry, ready to hear what *Nicholas* and his *Alyson* were as ready to report; gave all attention to the sad, but feigned relation of this woful accident. No matter, though the poor Carpenter interrupt them, his Tale must not so much as be heard by them. Their Story was the first, and it must be best heard.

<sup>1</sup> Up sterte hir Alison, and Nicholay (l. 638).

<sup>2</sup> The neigheboris, bothe smale and grete, (l. 640).



They told every man, that he was wood<sup>1</sup>  
 He was agast so of floyes flood.

Alas good man! what a Solemn discourse they make of his Frenzy, to palliate the rankness of their inordinate Fancy: With more than frontless impudence they avouch, that it was the Carpenter's distempered conceipt, that brought himself to this misfortune. For standing in great fear of a second *Noah's Flood*, which out of his own brain-sick Phantasie, he had long time conceited, to prevent all ensuing danger, he had caused to be provided one Kimelyn for himself, and other two for them to hang for Company, with all necessary provision against the violence of such an approaching Inundation. This were they enforced, for peace sake, to condescend to, being neither willing to incur his Displeasure, nor cross the Fury of his incorrigible humor. This merry Relation changeth the common peoples Admiration into Laughter; they jeer the lame Carpenter, and by their light Credulity vindicate two Wantons from dishonour. Though he vow and swear, they have vowed not to hear. That Beast of many heads will not credit this Beast of one head. They applaud the Jest, and asperse on him the disgrace.

Thus was *Alyson* cheared, *Nicholas* cheated, *Absolon* revenged, *John* the Carpenter gulled, and the Spectators infinitely pleased. Nor is it to be doubted, but if this Accident had not hapned, *Nicholas* or *Alyson* would have found one trick or other, to have deluded the Carpenter, enjoyed their Pleasure, and evaded Danger. And none in my judgment more probable than this; to wit, that when this supposed Deluge had not come according to the time limited, *Nicholas* out of a dissembled Zeal, would have pretended, how by the incessancy of his Prayers, Heaven's wrath was appeased, their Cataracts stopped, and this universal Overflow till an other season stayed. Howsoever, by the sweet Harmony which all this Family afterwards enjoyed, as may be charitably supposed, our Comment upon this Tale shall be in these Verses finally closed.

*The Cloud's dispers'd, the Flood or Deluge past,*

*And Absolon of wanton become chaste,*

*John to his Alyson is reconcil'd,*

*And Shee, perhaps, by Nicholas with Child,*

*John doth his jealous humor quite disdain,*

*What Alice did, she will not do again.*

*"Heav'n Smiles, Earth joyes, when all things fall amending,*

*"And Tragick Acts have such a Comick ending.*

<sup>1</sup> They tolden every man, that he was wood (l. 647)  
 He was agast so of 'Nowélis flood.'



*A Commentary upon Chaucer's  
Prologue to the Wife of Bath's  
Tale.*



Experience, though none authoritie &c.

This *English Homer*, our incomparable *Chaucer*, here brings in an antient *Wife of Bath*, with an Old *Wives Tale*, yet not so old as true, seeing her own Experience had confirm'd, whatsoever her tongue express'd: wherein she draws the first occasion of her discourse, from the griefs which accompany a Married life; being either weary of their present choice, and consequently affecting change; or being deprived of their choice, brings upon them new discontents, by an untowardly change. Then she discourseth of the number of Husbands which she had since her Twelve years of Age. Wherein, she presseth an Argument against such, as held opinion against Bygamy.

That sithen Christ went never but onis<sup>1</sup>  
To wedding, in the Cane of Galilee &c.

As if she should say, albeit Christ, who honoured Marriage with the very first Miracle that ever he wrought upon Earth, never went to any Wedding but once, and that in *Cane of Galilee*, will you hence conclude, that we are never to marry more than once, and so exclude Bigamy? So might you infer (upon like consequence) because Christ never scourged Buyers and Sellers out of the Temple but once, nor was tempted in the Desart (for ought we read) but once, nor wept over *Hierusalem* more than once, that neither sacrilegious Symonists are more than once to be scourged, nor temptation more than once to be suffered, nor tears of compassion more than once to be tendred. Nay, to refell this erroneous Opinion, which,

<sup>1</sup> That sith that Crist ne wentē never but onis (l. 10).

even some of the antient Fathers of the primitive Church have with too much pertinacy held, this good old wife of *Bath* hath an Argument in store for her own purpose, which she borrows from the very Touchstone of Truth, the holy Scripture.

——— Jesu god and man  
Spake in represe of the Samaritan  
Thou hast had fife husbands ———,<sup>1</sup>

Whence she proves, that in those daies there was no such restraint, but that it was usual and lawful for any one to marry after the Decease of their Husband: Albeit, we find it commended by Apostolical Authority, and recommended to Posterity, That those only were to be honoured for Widows, who were Widows indeed. True it is, that in this place here alledged by our Wife of *Bath*, this *Samaritan* was reprov'd, not for that she had married five Husbands, but for that after their Deaths, she had taken her self to one who was not her Husband; with whom, till then, she had lived without remorse of Conscience in all Incontinence. Albeit, that any one should be restrained to a prescript number either of Wives or Husbands, it was yet never heard. Not to insist therefore upon the difficulty of the Text, nor to play Scholè-Divine, which would ill beseem one of her Sex, she makes use of a Text far more easie and proper for her purpose.

But well I wote expresse without lie<sup>2</sup>  
God hadde us for to wexe and multiplie  
That gentill Text can I well understood &c.

She could find in her heart to multiply in Husbands as well as Children. One of the Ends of Marriage she observes, and this she embraceth with so free admittance, as her Age must not deprive her of hope to multiply: Husbands therefore she holds necessary Associates in all Ages, as well for Recreation as Procreation; being for their Love to leave whatsoever they most tenderly love. Parental Love is excluded, where Wedlock is admitted. Neither Bigamy, nor Octogamy (if Wives become their Husbands Survivors) are to be questioned. The last is no sooner committed to earth, than a new one is to be sought for on earth. Love and Youth, no nor Age, if it have a Colts tooth, can converse with Ghosts and Goblins. This she confirms by Instance.

<sup>1</sup> 'Thou hast y-had fyve housbondës,' quod he, (l. 17).

<sup>2</sup> But wel I woot expres, with-outë lye (l. 27).

To he the wise king Salamon<sup>1</sup>  
 I trow had wibes mo than on  
 As would God it leful were to me  
 To be refreshed halfe so ofte as he.

She holds it an honour to encrease in this Number; and by variety to allay satiety. Whence, she reflects upon her own former estate, and highly joys in her interchange of choyce.

Blessed be God, I have had fve<sup>2</sup>  
 Of which I have pyked out the best  
 Both of their nether purse, and eke their Chest.

She provides her self of a Husband to fit every sense, that she might more sensibly enjoy what she did by all likelihood most affect. That she might attain the end, she neglects not the means: No Procreation without Action. She holds it fit therefore to share in his Ability of Person, as well as Fortune. And because Practice begets Perfection, she loves ever to be in ure: She finds far more Advantage in dispatch, than delay; Her old Husband must no sooner be dispatch'd, than a new one must be catch'd: Thus is she ever mated and matched.

Of fve husbands scolynge am I<sup>3</sup>  
 Welcome the sixte when ever he shall dy.

The thought is taken: All flesh is mortal; but of all flesh, she would have none more mortal than her husbands. She would ever have her aged Husband look like Death's-head; mean time, her sage Admonitions are never wanting, to bid him remember his end. Life is but a Trouble; but of all others, she is most troubled with his Life. Thus dictates she of her Husband's Pilgrimage; which, by how much the shorter, it is for her all the better. A new Change is her Royal Exchange: Nor is the Market so scarce, but she hopes to fit her turn with a new Choice. Mean time, you may hence perceive, that she would have her Husband's Life of any Stuff rather than *Perpetuano* or *Sempiternum*. Like a charitable Wife, she could wish with all her heart that his Soul were at rest, while she were left to the Cares of the World and the Flesh; for both which, she would so seasonably provide, that as Fortune, and her

<sup>1</sup> Lo, here the wysë king, dan Salomon; (l. 35)  
 I trowe he hadde wyvës mo than oon;  
 As, woldë god, it leveful werë to me.

<sup>2</sup> Blessed be god that I have wedded fyve. (l. 44)  
 Of whiche I have y-pikëd out the beste.

<sup>3</sup> Of fyve husbondës scolering am I  
 Welcomë the sixtë, whan that ever he shal, (l. 45).



late Husband's Providence had sufficiently furnish'd her for the one, so she would take especial care that she were not famish'd in the other. This she confirms, not only with her own Opinion, but by Apostolical Doctrine.

For than the Apostel saith, that I am fre<sup>1</sup>  
To wedde a godeshalfe, where it liketh me &c.

This likewise she strengthens, to give freer scope to her own Affections, with a fresh current of new Instances.

What recketh me though folke say billany  
Of shrewd Lameth, and of his bigamy? &c.<sup>2</sup>

Here she makes a Rehearsal of sundry persons (and some of them antient holy Patriarchs, as *Abraham* and *Jacob*) who had divers wives: and in the end, proceeds farther, discoursing of the state of Virginity; which was recommended by way of Counsel, and no express Precept, by the Apostle; concluding:

He said, thereof precept had he none<sup>3</sup>  
Men may counsaile a woman to be one  
But counsailing is no commaundement  
He put it in our own judgement.

To all which, she addeth this enforcing Reason:

For had God commaunded maidenhede<sup>4</sup>  
Then had he dampned wedding out of drede.

Virginity to have the precedency is admitted, but not that Wedlock should be rejected. To live a Virgin is an extraordinary gift: This, she acknowledgeth, her weakness could never attain to. The use of this Doctrine therefore, she thus applies unto her self:

And for to ben a wife, he yave me lebe  
Of indulgence, so it be not to reprove<sup>5</sup>  
To wedde me, if that my make die  
Without exception of bigamie.

This Doctrine she approves, for it relisheth sweetly to her Palat. Yea but hence there ariseth another Objection; It is not good to touch a woman. To which she answers; not inordinately or licentiously:

<sup>1</sup> For thanne th' apostle seith, that I am free (l. 49)  
To wedde, a godd's half, wher it lyketh me.

<sup>2</sup> Of shrewd Lameth and his bigamy. (l. 54).

<sup>3</sup> He seyde, that precept ther-of hadde he noon (l. 65)

He putte it in our owenē jugement. (l. 68).

<sup>4</sup> For hadde god comanded maydenhede,  
Thanne had he dampned wedding with the dede.

<sup>5</sup> Of indulgence; so it is no reprove (l. 84).



For peril is, both fire and tow to assemble.<sup>1</sup>

It is good for young Folk to avoid occasion ; for it is that which breeds a Contagion. The Fire of Fancy needs no Oyl to inflame it, nor any other Fewel to feed it, than Opportunity, which never comes uninvited. True it is (saith she) that many there are who can live Maidens all their daies ; and these prefer Chastity before any man's Society : And much good may it do them. For my own part, I find no such strength in my self ; my Frailty requires a Fellow-helper.

For well ye know, a lorde in his household  
Hath nat every vessel all of gold<sup>2</sup>  
Some ben of ire.

All be not of one temper in their disposition, though of one Mould in respect of their composition. All are not to be Lillies of Chastity ; for so in short time should the world become a Desert. Vessels there are in one House of different Metals and Tempers ; yet those which are of the contemptiblest substance, are for use and service.

Virginite is great perfection  
And continence eke.

Some of our antient Fathers have compared Virginitie to Gold, Continence to Silver : Both of excellent esteem, albeit the former incomparably to be preferred before the later. But all have not the gift of Chastity, I mean, of Virgin-purity. Many things are in holy Writ unto our Observance offered and recommended, which are not expressly observed. Other things there are by express Precept to some more especially commended and commanded, whereof others may seem to be freed and exempted, at least, not so straitly enjoined.

——— Christ, that of perfection is well<sup>3</sup>  
Hadde not every wight he should go sell  
All that he had ———

He was a young man to whom Christ gave this Command ; one neither charged with Family nor Progeny. And in him, directing his speech to all such, as were resolv'd to leave the world, and retire from all earthly cares, that they might attain Perfection, by inuring themselves in these Tabernacles of Clay, to an Angelical Conver-

<sup>1</sup> For peril is bothē fyr and tow t'assemble (l. 89).

<sup>2</sup> He hath nat enery vessel al of gold. (l. 100).

<sup>3</sup> But Crist, that of perfeccioun is welle, (l. 107)  
Bad nat every wight he sholde go selle.

sation. These were with *Mary* to be speculatively affected; meantime those *Martha's*, who were troubled about many things, were not for their provident Care in domestick affairs, altogether condemned. Both in their degrees being respectively approved.

I woll bestow the flower of all myn age  
In the acts and fruit of marriage.<sup>1</sup>

She will lose no time. Let others be Saints for her; she knows what she was made for: These Members (saith she) of Generation, were not made only for emission and evacuation, but likewise for Conception and Procreation; Nor only for distinction sake, to know Male from Female, but that Male should be known by Female.

Why should men else in her bokes set<sup>2</sup>  
That man should yeld to his wife her dette  
Now wherewith shuld he pay his payment?  
Et he ne used his sely instrument.

Husbands are to give their wives due benevolence; but how should they receive their Benevolence, if they wanted the instrumental means? There was nothing made in vain, much less that main and principal Point, without which, to this wanton widow, all the world were not worth a Point. True it is, and she confesseth it, that there have been many Saints, who have led all their Lives in perfect Chastity; and she is so far from envying their Virginity, as she highly honours their Memory; yet must they give her leave to take another course, for fear she should do worse: Their Actions must not be her Example.

Let hem with brede of pure whete be fedde  
And let us wines eat barly bredde.<sup>3</sup>

Virgins are to be fed with Purest Manchet, because their Degree is highest; Wives with Barly Bread, because their condition is lower; yet so she may enjoy here what she most like, she cares not much though her reward be less when the later Harvest comes.

With barly bred, Marke tell can  
Our lord Jesu refreshed many a man.

All must not eat pure Manchet; nor all attain a Virgin-state: This is her Resolution.

<sup>1</sup> In th' actës and in fruit of mariage (l. 114).

<sup>2</sup> Why sholde men ellës in hir bokës sette, (l. 128).

That man shal yeldë to his wyf hir dette?

Now wher-with sholde he make his payëment

<sup>3</sup> Lat hem be breed of purëd whetë-seed, (l. 143)

And lat us wyvës hoten barly-breed;

En such a state as God hath cleped us  
I woll persever, I nam not precious  
En wifehode woll I use myn instrument  
As frely as my maker hath it sent.

She constantly holds to her old Tenet: She was not made for a Maid. What she hath receiv'd, must be as freely us'd. She expects both her Morn and Even Benevolence: She hopes to bestead her self of such a man, as will out of his Honesty or civil Curtsie, pay his Debt. Neither will she for her part be altogether unthankful, as he wipes off the old Score, he may begin a new.

An husband woll I have I woll not let  
Which shall be both my dettour and my thrall  
And have his tribulacion with all  
Upon his flesh, while that I am his wife  
I haue the power during all my life  
Upon his proper body, and nat he,  
Right thus the apostle tolde to me<sup>1</sup>  
And bad our husbonds for to loue us well  
All this sentence me liketh every dell.

She means to fit her self of an Husband both for Ability and Conformity to please her mind. He must give her due benevolence and become enthralled to her service. She expects homage and fealty from him, which she means to requite with some tribulation upon his Flesh. She will confirm her Affection with fresh remembrances of Correction: Whosoever wears the Doublet, she means to wear the Breeches. This braving humor of hers was to Life described by our modern Poet:

*Great's her Ambition, though her Size be small;  
Give but a Wench her will, and she has all.*

Soveraignty she will have, and such a domineering power over his captive body, as the Mare must prove the better Horse. This she makes good not only by her own private Opinion, nor any Fabulous Tradition, but (to her own Gloss) Apostolical Doctrine: Thus picks she out the Kernel, take the Shell who list. So as methinks she very nearly resembles her humor, who, like a sprightly Bride, hearing those words of Matrimony, to *Serve, Obey, Love* and *Honour*, so hardly digested them, as she willed the Minister to go no farther, till she had considered better of the matter: Whence the Poet, in the person of this metall'd Girle;

<sup>1</sup> Right thus th' apostel tolde it un-to me; (l. 160).

*Two last I like; to do the firster two  
I shall not have the Patience I vow.*

Whilst this jolly Wife of *Bath* thus descants on her own Command, intending, as you have heard, to make her next Husband her Slave:

Up stert the Pardoner, and that anon  
Now dame qd he, by God and by seint John  
He ben a noble prechour in this caas  
I was about to wedde a wife, alas  
What, should I bye it on my flesh so dere:  
Yet had I leber wed no wife to yere.

This commanding Dame startles her Hearers; and will cause this poor Pardoner answer his Minister, as sometimes a young man answer'd upon like occasion: Who, being to stand as Godfather for a Child, and to answer for it at the Fount, was asked, *Dost thou forsake the Devil and all his Works*, &c. (as is in the words of Baptism) answered in behalf of the Child, *I forsake them all*. The very same day, this young man was to be married, and being by the Minister demanded, *Dost thou take this Woman to thy married Wife?* &c. Imagining belike, that he was then answering in the person of the Child, to forsake the Devil and all his works, presently replied, *I forsake them all*. While the Pardoner, poor man, stands thus perplexed, fearing he need take up no other Cross, than his Wife, if his Fortune be to cope with such a Whipster as this *Virago*.

Abide qd she, my tale is not begon  
Nay, thou shalt drinke of another ton &c.<sup>1</sup>

The Pardoner had thought the worst was past; but she had another Brewing for him, worse than the first; and this must have a stronger tast of the bitter Hop of Tribulation. Her own Experience, as she confesseth, had sufficiently furnished her for matter of Discourse upon the troubles and afflictions which accompany Marriage; nevertheless, for so much as most part of men are more induced by Examples than Reasons, she means to enlarge her self in that kind.

For I shall tell ensamples mo than ten  
Who so wol not beware by other men  
By him shall other men corrected be  
These same wordes writeth Ptolome

An excellent Sentence of Ptolomy in his Astrological observations; He that will not be warned by others, shal be a warning

<sup>1</sup> Nay, thou shalt drinken of another tonne (l. 170).



unto others. Though others harmes cannot make him beware, the harm which he incurrs shall beget in others a more circumspect care: his folly shall make others wise, his weakness others more wary.

Dame I wol pray you, if your will were  
Said this Pardoner, as ye began  
Tel forth your tale, spare for no man  
And teche us yongg men of your practike.<sup>1</sup>

This Pardoner being a young man, and desirous to be instructed in that Honourable State, to which in short time, he purposeth to address himself, craves her Direction, whereto she inclines.

Gladly (qd she) if it may you like  
But that I pray to all this company  
If that I speke after my fantasy  
As taketh not a grefe—

She easily gives way to his request, provided, that none of all her company take distast at ought she shall say; being now to speak freely, and after her own Phantasie, purposely to pass time away: After which Introduction, she proceeds to this her pleasant Relation.

Now sirs, than shall I tell forth my tale  
As ever mote I drinke wine or ale  
I shal say soth. Tho husbonds that I had  
Thre of hem were good, and two were bad.<sup>2</sup>

She repeats afresh the number of her Husbands, with their Dispositions, yea, and Constitutions too, as appears after:

The thre good men were riche and olde  
Unnethes might they the statute helde [*sic*]  
In which they were bounden unto me<sup>3</sup>  
Ye wot well what I meane of this parde.

As if she should say, they were rich in Possessions, but of cold Constitutions. Nature was decay'd in them; they could not perform the Dues of Marriage. Their sleeps were too long, and their

<sup>1</sup> 'Dame, I wolde praye yow, if your wil it were,' (l. 184)  
Seyde this Pardoner, 'as ye bigan,  
Telle forth your tale, spareth for no man,  
And teche us yongg men of your practike.

<sup>2</sup> Now sirès, now wol I telle forth my tale.—(l. 193)  
As ever mote I drinken wyn or ale,  
I shal seye sooth, tho housbondes that I hadde,  
As three of hem were gode & two were badde.

<sup>3</sup> The three men were gode & riche & olde; (l. 197)  
Unmethè mightè they the statut holde  
In which that they were bounden unto me.



Benevolence too short; This was her meaning, she needs no clearer Exposition.

As God me helpe, I laugh whan I thinke<sup>1</sup>  
 How pitously a night I made hem to swinke  
 But by my fay, I tolde of it no store  
 They had me yebe her londe and her treasore &c.

They wanted not their Curtain-Lectures; being far better taught than fed. Time was indeed, when she humored their old Chops, and used all diligence to win their Love; not a good Morsel, but they had their part; but this was before they parted Stakes. The world is alter'd from what it was: They have now infeoffed her in the whole. All their Lands and Hereditaments, Estates Real and Personal, were past to her and hers for ever; insomuch, as should they have arrived to the Happiness to have surviv'd her, they could hardly recover their Thirds. Now she holds it lost labour to strive to please, where no Profit can arise.

What, should I take kepe hem for to please:<sup>2</sup>  
 But if it were my profite and myn ease  
 I set hem so a worke by my faie  
 That many a night they songen wel awaie.

They never laugh't till their hearts ak'd before they were married. She sets them their Task, and every night they were to render an Account. Before this their unhappy Marriage, they might sing *Care away*; Now must they change the Burden of their Song to *Well away*; for well it cannot be with them before their dying-day.

The bacon was not fet for hem I trowe  
 That some men haue in Essex at Donmowe.

The old Proverb was this:

*He that is not with Penitence taken  
 For that he married not before, or married now,  
 May challenge a Flitch of Essex Bacon,  
 And carve his Morsel in the Cow of Donmow.*

But these poor Snakes of hers were far from challenging any property in either. For their Marriage had brought out no good effect in them, but only Repentance. Rough were her Salutes, Bare her Commons, cold her Comforts. So far were they from Command, as their Lives were a continued slavery.

<sup>1</sup> As help me god, I laughë whan I thinke (l. 201).  
 How pitously a-night I made hem swinke

<sup>2</sup> What sholde I taken hedë hem for to plesë; (l. 213).

I governed hem so well after my lawe  
That eche of them full blisful was and fawe  
To bring me gay things fro the fayre  
They were full fain whan I spake hem faire.<sup>1</sup>

Fair words make Fools fain. It is true what the Poet sometimes sung :

*With Price or Prayer the hardest heart is won,  
Which Age must do, when nought else can be done.*

These aged and decrepit Husbands of hers, must supply their want of due benevolence with bounty and beneficence. One comfortable smile, or amorous look, are the readiest Keys to unlock these old mens Chests. To the Fayr they go, or rather creep ; but of necessity they must go whom the Devil drives. Where their only business is to curry Favour with a commanding Dame, by purchase of a Fayring. Other means they want to purchase their Peace ; they purpose therefore to buy it at any Price. Content is worth a Crown ; and it must cost them a Crown, but they will procure one minute of Content : And that's the longest Lease they can possibly expect.

Ye wise wives that can understonde  
Thus shuld ye speke, and bere hem on honde  
For halfe so boldly there can no man  
Swere and lye, as a woman can.<sup>2</sup>

An excellent Commendation for her own Sex ! And confirmed by a Tragick Poetess of our own, in these words :

*Women are least of Goods, the worst of Evils,  
Their best are worse than men, their worst than Devils.*

Truth is, they may make bold with themselves ; albeit, no modest nor gentle Spirit, (unless they sweat in *Suetnam's Surquedry*) can find in their heart to throw such Aspersions on them. But omitting this, you shall here perceive that this wife of *Bath*, out of her grounded Experience, like a judicious Schole-Mistress to all young married wives, begins her Lecture ; where she informs them how to demean themselves in their several places. Free and friendly is her Advice, accept it who list ; thus she proceeds.

<sup>1</sup> To bringe me gaye thinges fro the fayre, (l. 221)

They were ful glad whan I spak to hem fayre ;

<sup>2</sup> Thus shul ye speke and bere hem wrong on honde ; (l. 226)

For half so boldly can ther no man

Swere & lyen as a womman can.

A wise wife shall if that she can her goode<sup>1</sup>  
 Here him in honde the cowe is woode  
 And take witnesse of her owne mayde  
 Of her assent :

A twofold Exposition may be drawn from these Lines. First, If the good-wife desire to put Money in her Purse, she will pretend, for want of Grain, or some other vendible Commodity, that her Cow is run mad, and that she hath sold her to the Butcher for little or nothing, purposely to prevent danger; mean time she converts the benefit of this pretended Bargain to her self, and so cheats her Husband. Or else thus; She hath appointed a meeting with a private Friend, to whom she can well spare a Morsel, when her Husband sees not; And the place of this meeting is the Byer, or where her Kine lie; where to prevent her Husband's Repair, and free their amorous Embraces from all suspicious Fear, she feigns her Cow to be wood, which she makes good by her Maid's Assent, who is ready to justifie her Dames Speech: She wills him therefore to be wary that he come not there, lest he receive some hurt. Which Fetch is not much unlike that of hers, who desirous to do a Courtesie to a Friend, but out of all hope to get opportunity for effecting what she did so much desire; at last she remembred, how there was nothing in the world more terrible to her Husband, than a Bear; by which means she fitted her self of what she most lov'd, by affrighting him with what he most fear'd. This trick therefore she plays him, with consent of her Sweet-heart, whom she preferr'd before him. She contracts with her Friend to cover his Servant in a Bear's Skin, and tie him near to that private place where they had appointed, and which the poor Wittal himself no less suspected. Up he mounts, but as quickly descends; for the terrible sight of this counterfeit Bear drove from his memory the conceit of all other Fear, which the Epigrammatist no less pleasantly weaves up, in this manner.

*A wily Wench there was (as I have read)  
 Who us'd to Capricorn her Husband's head;  
 Which he suspecting, lay in private wait,  
 To catch the Knave, and keep his Wife more strait  
 But all in vain; they day by day did mate it,  
 Yet could his four Eyes never take them at it.  
 This subtil Wench perceiving how they should  
 At last prevented be, do all they could :*

<sup>1</sup> A wys wyf, if that she can hir good (l. 231)  
 Shal beren him on hond the Cow is wood

*For now Italian-like, her Husband grew  
Horn-mad, I wis, and kept her in a Mew ;  
Invent'd a Trick, which to accomplish better,  
Vnto her Friend she closely sent a Letter,  
And thus it was ; Friend, you shall know by me  
My Husband keeps me far more narrowly  
Than he was wont ; so as to tell you true,  
You cannot come to me, nor I to you.  
Yet spite of his Eyes, and as many more,  
Wee'l use those Pleasures which we us'd before :  
Only be wise, and second what I wish ;  
Which to express (my Friend) know this it is ;  
My Husband, as he hates the Horn to wear,  
Of all the Badges forth, so fears he th' Bear,  
More than all other Beasts which do frequent  
The Heathy Forest's spacious Continent.  
If thou wilt right me then, and pepper him,  
Cover thy Servant in a false Bear's Skin :  
And come to morrow as thou us'd before,  
Tying thy Servant to my Chamber door.  
After this quaint Direction he attir'd  
His man in Bear-skin, as she had desir'd :  
Entring the Chamber, he received is  
With many a Smile, Back-fal, and sweetned Kiss.  
For they're secure of all that was before,  
Having a Bear, that kept the Buffle from Dore.  
The Wittal Fool no sooner Inckling had,  
Then up the Stairs he ran as he were mad :  
But seeing none but th' Bear to entertain him,  
Of Horns he never after did complain him.*

I have here set down this Conceit to the full, because it hath such near resemblance to this part of *Chaucer's Tale* : Wherein we proceed.

— But herkneeth how I sayde.  
Sir old Reynarde, is this thyn aray<sup>1</sup>  
Why is mine neighbours wife so gay ?

The first instruction she gave young Wives, was how to Gull their Husbands, and how they were to cram their Purses with nimble cheats, or enjoy an amorous choice. Now like a domineering House-wife, she tells them, how they must twit their Husbands, if their Neighbours Wives goe trimmer or neater than they. As if she should say, What Sir *Raynard*, ye fox-skin'd Chuffe, must I come behind such a Gossip for fashion ? Must I Snayl-like, keep

<sup>1</sup> ' Sir oldē kaynard, is this thyn aray ? (l. 235).  
Why is my neigheborēs wyf so gay ?



still under roof, while thou goes a Ranging to thy Neighbour's house, and neighs after thy Neighbour's Wife? You Sir, may whisper a wanton Tale in the ear of such a Maid, and you must not be reproved? Nay Sir *Lecher*, you must be in all your amorous actions approved? Mean time, if I have a Gossip or a Friend, without conceit of ill, I must be chid, while you, Sir, come reeling home, upbraiding me, that I play wanton in such an house, or dishonour you in such a place. Every Ale-bench must be the Stage where you act my disgrace: where sometimes, you revile me, for my poverty; or else disparage me for my Parentage; or if my descent be above yours, you tax me of pride, and tell me, high blood ever sparkles for good Cloathes. Sometimes my mirth mads you, otherwhiles my melancholy distracts you. If I be fair, my fort is half wonne, my chastity cannot hold out long; every opportunity tempts me, every light Assailant taints me. Some, you say, chuse us for Portion, others for Proportion; some for Beauty and outward Feature, others for Breeding and Behaviour; some for Affability, others for Agility; some for pure and dainty hands, others for small enazur'd Arms; All which, you say, are Lures to Lust, and keep the High-Road to the Devil's Court. Again, if I be foul, why then I turn common Haxter; I will never want for Trading: As fair Forts are won by long Siege; so we that are foul, will rather lay siege unto others, than not be won. Spaniels are not more fawning, than we are fancying. He were a mean Personage we could not affect, and this were our comfort, "She is a black Crab that can find no Mate: Though our choice be not so worthy, we shall find one Gander-geose or other to fit our Fancy.

Thus saist thou *lore!*, whan thou goest to bed<sup>1</sup>  
That no wise man nedeth for to wed.

A strange kind of Even-song; when the day is spent in ranging, and the Evening in railing. Doest thou think, *Lore!*, that to go to heaven by a Wife, is to go by Bow and not by String? Well Sir, I hope to see you go by the String, and then your way will be readier. You say, a dropping, smoaky house and a chiding wife will cause a man fly out of his house. What will a dropping Nose do, you Ice-Ickle you? You say, Wives have the Trick to dissemble and shroud their Vices, yea, and colour them too with fair Pretences, as if they were special Vertues; But Wood that shines most, is

<sup>1</sup> . . . whan thow goost to bedde; (l. 273)  
And that no wys man nedeth for to wedde.



most commonly least sound: We can find time to fit you with a Penny-worth, and make your Ears look through your Nightcap, after the new Fashion: And what of all this? We leave (I hope) sufficient for your queasie Stomachs, when all this is done. Again, like a Proverbial old Dottrel, you say, that not only for Oxen, Asses, Horses, and Hounds, but even Basons, Lavers, Spoons, Stools, Pots, & other Vessels, men use to try them, before they buy them; whereas, Wives must not be tryed, till they cannot deny it; being to be wedded before they be Bedded. Heyday! is your Spirit so Coltish? It seems, if your Judgment might pass, or stand for a Decree, you would try before you married, and so take occasion to repent before you needed. Neither will these untowardly humors content you, but they must yet run on worsere Extreame. Your Doltship will not stick to say, how nothing displeaseth me more, than not to hear my Beauty praised, my less than ordinary parts admired; Nay, I am discontent forsooth, when you look not Babies in mine Eyes, and fame my Beauty in every place; Again, if you make not a solemn Feast on my Birthday, with preparation of Luscious Fare for your Guests, of Sumptuous Attire for my self, a free and friendly Welcom to all, especially to my Nurse, whom you must that day highly honour, and the Crisp-hair'd Wag that attends me in my Chamber, with all my Fathers Folk and his Allies, you are out of my Books for ever.

Thus saist thou old barel full of lies.<sup>1</sup>  
 And yet of our prentise Jenkin  
 For his crisp heer, shining as gold fine  
 And for he squireth me both up and doune  
 Hast thou caught a false suspencion  
 I woll him nat.——

Thus Sir, you use the Liberty of your lavish Tongue; yea, my poor prentice *Jenkin* cannot be free from your Jealousie and Suspicion. If I at any time use him for the Squire of my Body, or to Usher me in the streets: Your yellow humour interprets this to be too much familiarity, and that *Jenkin* must become Father of your Progeny. No Sir, you shall know that I am not brought to that low sail, but if you should dye to morrow, I could make choice of a statelier Minion than *Jenkin*. But to let this pass, how is it, you

<sup>1</sup> Thus seistow, oldē barel ful of lyes! (l. 302)  
 And yet of our apprentice Janekyn  
 For his crisp heer, shininge as gold so fyn  
 Yet hastow caught a fals suspencion;

old musty Dotard, that with a sorrow you hide the keys of your Chests from me; have I not a property in your goods aswel as you? Do you mean to make an Ideot of me?

Thou shalt nat both though thou were wood<sup>1</sup>  
Be maister of my body and of my good

How is it Sir, that you sometimes promised with your body to honour me, and with all your worldly goods to endow me, and that now with the first you dishonour me, and for the later (like a Devil in the Vault) you lock them from me? I think Sir, if it were in your power, you would lock me up in your Chest too, but that's above your cunning. Had you but so much wit in your Sage Sconce, you would rather in this sort demean your self towards me, "Good wife, go where you list; disport your self where you please, "mine ear is open to no Tales; my knowledge hath given me that "approvement of you, as I cannot suspect you. For I must tell you, we women cannot endure that any one should question us where we live, or whom we love; where we gad, or when we Gossip. Of all men blest be that saying of the wise Astrologer *Ptolomy*, who drew this conclusion from the Depth of his Philosophy.

Of all men his wisdom is the best<sup>2</sup>  
That recketh not who hath the world in hond.

His condition is the happiest, who for Affairs of this world is indifferentest. This Sentence here this Goodwife useth, purposely to withdraw her Husband from intermeddling in his own Estate, and absolutely to invest her self in it. As if she should say, You Sir, that have the one Foot in the Grave already, how is it that you incumber your mind so much with things transitory? you have enough for your time; shake hands with the world, seeing the world hath now shaken hands with you. Leave the care of these Businesses to me. Neither, do I only speak this in behalf of your temporal Estate, but in delights of your Bed. What if another take a Shive of your cut Loaf; must this trouble you? Doubt not, Good man, but you shall have enough left to serve your turn. He is too too envious, that cannot endure another should light his Candle at his Lanthorn. This neither lessens your Light, nor the other weakens your delight.

<sup>1</sup> Thou shalt nat bothë, thogh that thou were wood (l. 313)

<sup>2</sup> 'Of allë men his wisdom is the hyste. (l. 326)  
That rekketh never who hath the world in honde!'

Thou saiest also, that if we make us gay<sup>1</sup>  
With clothes, or with precious array  
That it is peril of our chastite &c,

Besides, all this, you say Sir, if we go gay, we must needs be gamesom. We cannot be neat, but we do it to get a new Mate: And this you strengthen with an Apostolical Exhortation, "*Array your selves in comely Apparel, with Shamefastness and Modesty; not with broided hair, or Gold, or Pearls, or costly Apparel; but as becometh women that profess the fear of God.*" It seems, you are an excellent Text-man for your own purpose. But I must not grow out of Love with my self, for your Censure. I mean not to be taught by your Text; nor to make your Rubrick my Rule.

I nill not worch as moch as a Gnatte<sup>2</sup>  
Thou saiest also, I was like a Catte.

Comly Comparisons! You say a sleek-skin'd Cat will ever go a Caterwawing; she cannot abide keeping at home. No more will I (for so you apply it) I must needs be shewing my gay Cloaths, there is no remedy; for Pride cannot endure to attend a Family.

Sir old foole, what helpeth thee to spien<sup>3</sup>  
For though thou play Argus with his hundred yen &c.

Never play the Fool thus, to think that your Jealousie can prevent Opportunity.

*No Jealousie can ever that prevent,  
Where as two parties once be full content.*

For had you as many eyes as *Aristor's* Son, the hundred-eyed *Argus*, I should find one Trick or other to gull you, and distinguish your Coat by an invisible Crest.

Thou saiest eke, that ben things three<sup>4</sup>  
The which troubleth all this yearth.

Wine is furious, an Eave-dropper dangerous; but a Woman, you say, of all others most malicious. Yea, you have other Proverbial Resemblances, which, at first sight, are like your wise Parables; wherein you compare a Woman's Love to Hell, ever raging; to barren Land, no good bearing, without water, thirsty and seering;

<sup>1</sup> Thou seyst also, that if we make us gay (l. 337)  
With clothing and with precious array.

<sup>2</sup> I wol nat wirche as muchel as a gnat. (l. 347).

<sup>3</sup> Sire oldē fool, what eyleth thee to spyen? (l. 357)  
Thogh thou preyē Argus, with his hundred yēn.

<sup>4</sup> Thou seydest eek, that ther ben thinges three, (l. 362)  
The whichē thinges troublen al this erthe.

to Wild-Fire, ever burning, and desiring to consume whatsoever is combustible, or apt for kindling: You say likewise, as Trees are decayed by Worms, so are Husbands by their Wives. But truth is, if we trouble you at Board, such feeble Lorels as you, trouble us as little in Bed.

**Cordings, right thus as ye haue understand<sup>1</sup>  
Bare I stiffly mine old husband on hond.**

Oft-times would I twit them with these and such like Speeches, which (as I pretended) were usually bolted forth by them, when they were drunk; and two Witnesses had I in readiness to justifie their Abuse, my jolly *Jenkin*, and my Neece. Oh how I could set my Countenance to frown and lowr, and sell store of Powts for nothing! I was never in my right home, but when I was out of Tune; I could whine, and plain, when I felt but little Pain. Mean time, he that came first to Mill, had his Corn first ground. I made no Bones of chusing a dainty Morsel for my own Tooth: Yet all this while, I lay all the blame on them: They were in the fault, though I reapt the Fruit.

**Of wenches would I bere hem on hond  
When that for sick, unnetthes might they stond.<sup>2</sup>**

I charg'd them with Wenching, when God knows, they stood in greater need of a Cawdle. Yet it delighted these old Chrones to be so thought of: They desir'd rather to be tax'd of Luxury, than Disability. And to [so?] to sharpen their Appetite, I told them, that so jealous a conceit I had of them, as my walking forth a nights was for no other end, than to take them napping with their dainty Doxies. Under which colour and pretence, I took my Range, and freely consorted with those I lov'd best. I had a Friend in a Corner to cool my Choler, and cure my Distemper. Reer Suppers were my Solace: I suited my youthful Fancy to jovial Company: And Company causeth somewhat.

**Disceit, weping, spinning, God hath gibe  
To women, kindly while that they live.<sup>3</sup>**

To have Deceit in our Waies, Tears in our Eyes, and the Spindle in our hands, is an Instinct given us by Nature. By which subtil

<sup>1</sup> Read 'understonde.' (l. 379).

Bar I stifly myne olde housbondes on honde.

<sup>2</sup> Of wenches wolde I beren him on honde (l. 393)

Whan that for syk unnethes mighte he stonde.

<sup>3</sup> Deceitē, &c.

To wommen kindly whyl they may live. (l. 402).



means, I ever had the better of them, and gave them the Foyl at their own Weapon. Continually was I murmuring and repining, I was a Chafing Dish at their Board, and Wormwood in their Bed. I caus'd them bite oth' Bridle, while I was ever chawing some good Bit.

I would no lenger in the bed abide  
(If I felt his arme over my side)<sup>1</sup>  
Till he had made his ransome unto me  
Than would I suffer him to do his nicete.<sup>2</sup>

I must tell you, I was a coy Dame, and stood on my Pantofles. I could not brook that his dry and seer Arms should embrace my Wast. Had his Body indeed been as strong as his Breath, I could have lik'd him better; but the weakness of the one gave an Earthy strength to the other. Turn to him I would not under a couple of Capons; He must purchase my Love, or farewel Frost.

And therefore enery man this tale I tell  
Uline whoso may, all bene for to sel  
With empty honds——

I am nothing nice in the Discovery of my own Device; make use of it who will. Here is the Fair, buy who list: they may furnish themselves for nothing. Sometimes I would not stick to put on a smooth Brow, and feign a kind of Fonding, with a strong desire of seeming to accept what was privately tendered by him.

And make me than<sup>3</sup> a fained appetite  
And yet in Bacon had I neuer delite.

Yet all this was but a seeming Appetite; Such course Meat was not for my dainty Stomach. All this, and more did I for mine own ends, Which I had no sooner obtain'd, than I put on mine old Countenance. Little Quiet could he have either in his Repast, or Repose, at Bed, or at Board. Yea, so strong was my Spleen, so violent my Hate, as had the Pope's Holiness been present, I am persuaded I should have shewn small Reverence to his Pontifical Presence. Out might my Passion have issued, and shewn her Impatience. Neither do I remember that he ever gave me one word, but I gave him two for't. Yea, should I now make my last Will and Testament, and discover to the world all our Bickerings, and unsavoury Parlies; I would take my Book-Oath that I am nought

<sup>1</sup> If that I felte, &c. (l. 410).

<sup>2</sup> Than wolde I suffre him do, &c. (l. 412).

<sup>3</sup> Omit 'than.'



behind with him, but have fitted him to the full. And this was the direct way to purchase my Peace, otherwise had we been at Debate for ever.

For though he lokēd as wode as a lion<sup>1</sup>  
 Yet should he faile of his conclusion &c.

Thus could I vye in colours to delude his Nature, and fit my Disposition to oppose his Humor. If he playd the Lamb, I could play the Lion; if he the Lion, I the Lamb.

Than would I say, good lefe take kepe  
 How mekely loketh wilkin our shepe<sup>2</sup>  
 Cum nere my spouse,——

What a Racket my pretty Pignie keeps? Let me kiss thy tother Cheek, my lovely Honey-suckle. Can you that have preach'd so long of *Job's* Patience, retain so long in your heart any Malice? Ye men, as you are stronger by nature, so should you be discreeter, and of stayeder temper. What man, are you jealous of me that you do not only enjoy me? What, would you have my best Commodity to your self? Why, take it to you, and much good may it do you. I know you for a notable Soaker; you cannot endure a Sharer: Well, go to; you shall have it to you, and your sole use for ever. For know, my best Spouse, if I would set my Jewel at sale; I could go in more gaie and fresh Arraie than I do now: but the honest Continnence of my Desire makes me walk in homelie Attire. Good sooth, you are much to be blam'd; I have no Toy, but for your Tooth. My own Breast knows best whether I love any other; For if I did, your quick Eie would soon discover it.

Such maner words had we on hond  
 Now wyll I speake of my fourth husbond.<sup>3</sup>

Thus far has our Wife of *Bath* discours'd of the Natures, Humors, and Features of her three first Husbands: Wherein she hath exprest to life how harshlie Youth and Age are suited; with especial Directions how the Distastes of a loathed Bed may be alliaied; how Youthful Delights may be wisely carried; and the waiwardness of Age better tempered.

My fourth husband was a rebelour<sup>4</sup>  
 This is to say, he had a paramour.

<sup>1</sup> For thogh he lokēd as a wood leoun (l. 429).

<sup>2</sup> How mekely loketh wilkin ourē sheep. (l. 432).

<sup>3</sup> Swiche maner wordes haddē we on honde (l. 451)

Now wol I speken of my fourthe housbonde.

<sup>4</sup> My fourthe housbondē was a revēlour (l. 453).

She is now fitted in her kind; what she feigned to be in her three Husbands before, she finds really lov'd by her<sup>1</sup>fourth: Neither will she abate him a hair, and she gives the Reason.

— I was yong and full of ragerie  
Stubborn and strong, and joly as a Pie.

She was but in the Flower of her Youth, albeit, she had dispatch'd three Husbands; full of Metal and Agilitie; of a stubborn and strong Will, for it had never been deni'd her; of a pliant and nimble Body; and this had such found who had tri'd her: One as right as my Leg, and seemingly, of that wanton Wenches humor, who could not endure to have this word, *Notwithstanding*, mentioned in her Jointure, but lik'd well of this Clause, *Provided alwaies*; which if he were not, another should. That her Education or Breeding was good, may appear by those singular Qualities which she privately both professed and practised. She could dance neatly, and sing to the Harp sweetly, if she had but liberally tasted of the sweet Grape: Which, it appears, she dearly loved, by her free Reproof towards one, by whom his Wife was not only from drinking Wine restrained, but being taken at it, was of Life deprived.

Metellus, the foule churle the swine  
That with a staffe beraft his wife her life  
For she dronke wine: though I had be his wife &c.

This is meant of that temperate *Roman*, *Metellus*, who, albeit he fell into this violent Extream, upon the finding of his wife dis-tempered with Wine (which Vice, by the Testimonie both of *Plutarch* and *Macrobius*, was held among the *Romans* to be more punishable in Women, than Adulterie) was highly renowned for a Noble and Victorious Souldier, having highly improved his Fame to his Countries succeeding Honour. But had this Good-wife of *Bath* been *Metellus* his Wife, she vows she would have pl'd the Pitcher in spite of all his Valour: and had a little touch of *Venus* Game too, after her Blood were inflam'd with the Spirit of Liquor.

For also seker, as cold engendreth haile  
A licorus mouth must have a lecherous taile.

This her own Experience had taught her, which she patcheth up with a shread of her Philosophy, to strengthen it the better. Wine, indeed, affords Fewel for Lust. The understanding part being darkned and drowned, the Sensitive part becomes domineering, by subjecting Reason to blind Affection. She finds poor Defence for

her Honour, who deprives her self of that which should be her best Armour.

But lorde Christ, when it remembreth me  
Upon my youth, and my jolite<sup>1</sup>  
It tickleth me about the hart roote  
Unto this daie it doth my hart boote &c.

It delights her to remember the Pranks of her Youth; and no doubt, it would highly content her to have a Tast of *Æson's* Herb, and so become young again: For her Desires continue strong, though her Strength be weak; her Thoughts green, though her Hairs be gray.

But age alas, that all woll envenime  
Hath me heraft my beaute, and my pith  
Let go farewel, the devil go therewith.

A charitable old Trader! Age like a Venom, hath crept upon her, the Beauty and Strength of her Youth have left her; Both which, seeing she cannot recover, she freely bequeaths the Devil that which she cannot keep with her. Yet holds she on in her old Trade of Folly.

The flour is gone, there nis no more to tell  
The bran (as I best can) now mote I sell.

Few or none but they will leave Sin, when Sin hath left them; but this merry Gossip will scarcely leave it, when she is now left by it. Though the Flower of her Youth be lost, the Bran of her age is left, and that must now be bolted, or she will never rest contented.

But yet to be right merry woll I fonde  
Now forth to tell of my fourth husbonde.<sup>2</sup>

All this which hath been said last, must serve for a Preamble to her fourth Husband; of whom her Discourse must be but short, according (as may be supposed) to the length of his Life, and height of her Love.

I saie I had in hart<sup>3</sup> great despite  
That he of any other had delite.

He was of a wanton Life himself, and therefore looks for his Wife in the Oven, where himself had been. Ill Doers are ever ill Deemers. None are more suspicious than such as are most

<sup>1</sup> Upon my yowthe and on my jolitee. (l. 470)  
It tikleth me aboute myn hertē rote.

Unto this day it dooth myn hertē bote

<sup>2</sup> Now wol I tellen of my fourthe housbonde. (l. 480).

<sup>3</sup> Read 'hertē' (l. 481).

vicious. A Licentious man's Eye is in every Corner; to whom the very least Occasion will minister apparent ground of Suspicion.

But he was quit, by God and saint Jocē<sup>1</sup>  
I made him of the same wood a troce<sup>2</sup> &c.

Truth was, he could not for his heart be more jealous of me, than I was of him. Neither indeed, had he any just cause to suspect me of Wantonness. Here she excuseth herself that she never consorted with any good Fellows for her own bodily pleasure, in all this Husband's time. Only she invited them to good Chear; being now turn'd professed Gossipper: And all this, perchance, (so perverse was her Disposition) rather to nettle and sting her Husband, than any singular Delight she took, either in respect of her Comrades, or Delicacy of Tooth: as may be probably gathered by those Verses immediately following.

— I made folke such chere  
That in his own grece I made him frie<sup>3</sup>  
For anger, and for very jelousie.

Out of a Jealousie, or rather a constant perswasion, that she was as liberal of her Flesh, as of her Fare, he fried himself in his own Grease: he wasted himself with anger: seeing both a weakning of his Fortune, and impeaching of his Honour (as he verily suspected) cope so closely one with another.

By god, in yearth I was his purgatorie  
For which I hope his soul be in glory.<sup>4</sup>

It seems she was good for something, if it were but to become her Husband's Purgatory; more properly the Touchstone of his Patience. By this means she thinks he had his Purgatory on Earth, and consequently, without any Rub or Stay in his way, he may go directly to Heaven. Afflictions being Exercises, he needed not suffer his Body to rust for want of them, having both at Bed and at Board such plenty of them.

For God it wote, he sate ful oft and song  
Whan that his shoe full bitterly him wrong.

Like a down-right honest man, he set the best Face he could on't. Yet when he feigned most Mirth, he had greatest cause to mourn. Every man knew not where his shoe wrinch'd him. He might laugh till his heart ak'd again, yet never a whit nearer relief:

<sup>1</sup> . . . . and by saint Jocē! (l. 483).      <sup>2</sup> Read 'croce' (l. 484).

<sup>3</sup> That in his owene grece I made him frye (l. 487).

<sup>4</sup> For which I hope his soule be in glorie. (l. 490).



She had vow'd to be his Executioner, purposely to become his  
Executor.

He died whan I came fro Hierusalem  
And lieth in grave under the Rode beam.

This good wife, belike, had taken her Pilgrimage to *Jerusalem*, either voluntarily, or by Injunction. No doubt, had she plaid Pilgrim all her time, her Husband had a lighter heart. But now coming home, she finds her Husband drawing near his last home. Whom she sees no sooner departed, than she takes course to prevent his Revival, to have him no less suddenly, than solemnly buried. Under the Rood-loft (a place of especial Reverence in former times) she causeth his Grave to be made; albeit in no sumptuous manner as ancient Heroes have been interred, as she after expressed :

All nis his tombe so curious<sup>1</sup>  
As was the sepulture of him Darius  
Which that Apelles wrought so subtelly  
It is but wast to burie him preciously.

To bestow on him so Gorgeous or Sumptuous a Sepulchre, as was that which was erected in the honour of *Darius*, formed by the curious Art of famous *Apelles*; or as that of *Artimisia* in the Memory of her *Mausolus*, were but (as she thinks) lost labour: So much cost would make a poor Executor, and too much impoverish the Survivor.

Let him farewell, god give his soul good rest.  
He is now in his grave and in his chest.

He is now laid in Earth, and his Soul, I hope, at rest: He had my leave to be gone before he went. To grieve for that which cannot be remedied is bootless. I will spare then to shed any Tears, seeing they are no less Foolish than fruitless. And so Good night to my fourth Husband.

Now of my ffith husbond woll I tell  
God let never his soule come in hell.<sup>2</sup>

She had no sooner left her fourth Husband in his Grave, than she makes ready to go to Church for a Fifth. And of such an one she speeds her self, that it seems his Soul deserv'd well of her, whatsoever his Body did. Yet is it to be wondred at, how she

<sup>1</sup> Al is his tombë noght so curious (l. 497).

As was the sepulere of him, Darius,

Which that Appellës wroghtë subtilly.

<sup>2</sup> Now of my ffithë housbond wol I telle (l. 503)

God letë his soulë never comë in helle!

should be so charitable in her blessings towards him, who was so shrewd in his blows, towards her. But of this she gives a reason: Truth is, he was shrewd to me, and gave me store of rib roast, imagining belike that I was of the nature of the Wallnut Tree, that must be cudgelled before it be fruitful; yet for all this, I cannot but remember him with a great deal of love. Though he gave me correction, he had an other winning way to gain my affection. He was of an able and active body, and could till me on with such pretty Toies and Tales when he desired to have that which I no less desired my self, and he could win me with a smile, and with a smooth brow allay my storm.

I trow I lov'd him the better, for that he<sup>1</sup>  
Was of his love so dangerous to me.

A strong Womans reason.

*Follow women, they will fly you,  
Fly but Women, they'll draw nigh you.  
If you would a Woman move,  
Seem to love not, when you love.*

The way then to win them, is seemingly to wean our affection from them. Proffer'd ware, be it never so precious, is disvalued; That only is held worth our purchase, which is with niceness gained: whatsoever is forbid us, is with eager appetite pursued by us. To utter our Ware with danger, will improve our commodity most to our advantage and honour.

And to great chepe is hold at to little price<sup>2</sup>  
This knoweth every woman that is wise

Far fetch'd and dear bought is good for Ladies. A vile price makes the commodity no less vile. Highly then was this Husband affected, because he was dainty and nice in his affection. He caus'd her now and then to bite oth' bridle, and to fast, that her Stomach might become stronger for the next Feast. She had now and then a bit and a buffet with't. All her dayes were not Holy-dayes; this made her pleasure (because rare) more welcom, when it came.

My fifth husbonde, God his soule blesse  
Which I took for love and no riches<sup>3</sup>  
He sometime was a Clerk in Oxenforde  
And had left schole, & went at home to bord

<sup>1</sup> I trowe I loved him best, for that he (l. 513).

Was of his love dangerous to me.

<sup>2</sup> And to greet cheep is hold at litel prys (l. 523).

<sup>3</sup> Which that I took for love and no riches (l. 526).

With my gossip, dwelling in our toun<sup>1</sup>  
 God habe her soul, her name was *Alisoun*

Here she expresseth his state, condition, and profession; his state or condition, it may seem, was but mean, but his person promising; pure love and no other worldly respect made her chuse him. He was a Scholar, and unprefer'd, and consequently not like to be rich. But now had he left Schole, with his hopes of some poor Fellowship, which were but small, in regard of his weak Parts, or that he had no Letters commendatory, from some great or powerful Favorite, to procure it; And now in stead of a Fellowship, he intends to board himself privately with Dame *Alyson*, this Good-wifes Gossip. Now whether this were the self-same *Alyson*, the Carpenter's Wife, mentioned in our *Miller's Tale*, I will not here dispute; Only, with submission alwaies to deeper Judgments, I conceive, that by all probability it should be the very same *Alyson*, but that this Clerk of *Oxford* here mentioned, was *Nicholas* the Astronomer, who fancied Dame *Alison*, I cannot assent; for this bears another name. Be she what she will be, it appears she was a kind-hearted Gossip, and of inward Acquaintance with our Wife of *Bath*: Being ever constantly of her Bosom-counsel, together with another Wife, whom she names not, and her Neece, in all which, she reposed great Confidence. No Secret could there be, which might either concern her Husband or her self, but it was imparted to one of these three. No counsel so private, no passage so secret, which was not to these communicate.

And so I did it often God it wote  
 That made his face full ofte redde and hote.

This Wife of *Bath* was too full of Chinks to be a good Secretary. Her Husband could tell her nothing over night, but next day she would be Carrier of it abroad: wherein our Poet privately glanceth at such as too freely use to commit their nearest thoughts to the secrecy of a Woman: whereof though some be Seals, others be Sieves.

And so beffl, that ones in a Cent  
 So oft time I to my Gossip went &c<sup>2</sup>

Now she comes to relate the season and occasion of her first Familiar Acquaintance with this Clark of *Oxford*, her jolly *Jenkin*: This begun in Lent, but she means to make it no time of Abstinence.

<sup>1</sup> With my gossip, dwelling in our toun. (l. 529).

<sup>2</sup> So often tyres I to my gossip wente (l. 544).

She and her kind Gossip must take Air, and in such Moneths as afford most delight. Yet cannot those fresh and fragrant Fields sufficiently refresh them, unless they have *Jenkin* the Scholar for an Usher to conduct them. And a good Opportunity had this Good wife, for her Husband was at *London*: With liberty therefore might she take her range to Vigils, Visitations, Preachings, Pilgrimages and Processions; to Stage-plays, Puppet-plaies and Marriages; where she might see and be seen; yea felt, heard and understood. Her gay Scarlet Petticoat, and Broad-cloath Gown need now fear no Moaths; they are too daily worn to be eaten with Worms. Her Cloaths make every day their Holiday. Till her Husband come home, she means not to make her own house her home. The Field must be her Walk, and *Jenkin* her Mate.

Now woll I tell forth what happed me<sup>1</sup>  
I saie, that in the feldes walked we.

Now begun she to grow more familiar with this dainty Clerk. She is now not only for walking, but talking with him; yea, and dalliance too; till in the end, she holds him for her only private Friend, and such an one, as she could find in her heart to commend to his Trust the greatest Secret she has in the world.

I spake to him, and saied how that he  
If I were wedowe, should wedde me.<sup>2</sup>

This is plain dealing, and deserves the Scholar's favourable construction: As if she should say, Ye Scholars are dangerous Youths; when ye woo least, ye win most; when ye speak least, ye prevail most. Did ye perceive nothing, Sir *Jenkin*, when of all others, I chus'd you to keep me company; walked and talked with you privately; and made you acquainted with my bosom-Secrecy? Truly, I must tell you, should mine Husband die, as all Flesh is mortal, I am verily persuaded that I should wish with all mine heart to enjoy an Armful of you. In good sooth we women are the veriest Fools in the world: If we love, we cannot lain: whereas you men are mighty Dissemblers, and will bring us weak things into Fools Paradise: when you seem to love us, you will soonest leave us. Well, durst I trust you, I could tell you somewhat would make your Ear tingle: But I will not; and yet I think I must; it will needs out. I am half persuaded you have given me some Love-

<sup>1</sup> Now wol I tellen forth what happed me. (l. 563).

<sup>2</sup> I spak to him, & seyde him, how that he (l. 567)

If I were widwe, sholdē weddē me.



powder, or I should never fawn nor fond on you after this manner. Know Sir, I made choice of you for your Person, no Preferment nor Possession ; for I hear, you have but a poor Scholar's Fortune. Now think not that I stood unprovided before I came to be acquainted with you. No Sir ; I must tell you, I need not want for Pleasure, if I took delight in such Chaffer. I ever held her a foolish Mouse that had but one hole to creep out at. I am neither so old nor mishapen, but I should find one or other to accept of the motion.

I bare him on hand he had enchanted me<sup>1</sup>  
My dame taught me forsooth that subtilte.

A dainty Device ! This was Dame *Alyson's* subtilty. And that she might all the better persuade him, that she thinks on him by day, she tels him how she dreams of him by night. Where she relates to him the Circumstances of her terrible Dream : How she verily thought in her sleep that he came and assaulted her, purposing to have slain her : and how she started, as she lay upright in her Bed, to resist his Fury ; which were the least of her thought upon so fair an Opportunity. Yet interprets she all this in the best sence. For that abundance of Blood wherewith she thought her self embath'd, did signifie Gold, which he might be sure to enjoy, if ever her Husband should die, and her self to boot.

For blood betokeneth gold, as I was taught  
And all was fals, I demed of him right naught.

All these supposed Dreams were but to delude him, and make him more confident of the Love she bare him. A right careful Observer of whatsoever her subtil Tutor Dame *Alyson* had inform'd her. One who had sufficient Experience to instruct an apt Scholar in Rules of Dalliance.

And now sir let me se, what shal I sain  
A ha, by God I haue my tale again.

A excellent Rhetorical\* Figure here used by our Poet.

It seems the remembrance of the proper Personage of her neat Clark, had like to have made her quite forget her Tale. Yet, at last, she recalls to mind the Story whereon she is to treat, which Subject, sometimes, she was as apt to forget.

When that my fourth<sup>2</sup> husbond was on here  
I wept algate, and made sorie chere.

<sup>1</sup> I bar him on honde, he hadde enchanted me ; (l. 575)

My damē taughtē me that soutiltee—

\* *Επάνοδος.* (R. B.)

<sup>2</sup> Read 'fourthē' (l. 587).

Or for want rather of natural Tears, she furnish'd her self of other effectual means : She wrapt an Onion in the one Nook of her Handkercher, or pump'd-for Tears ; or drew her face into a Purse, purposely to feign a kind of sorrowing, when her Heart was full of Joy, in hope to enjoy her *Jenkin*.

But for that I was purveied of a make  
I wept but small, and that I undertake.

No doubt, but she had prov'd a better Mourner, had she been a worser Purveior : Like to that Widow, whereof I have heard this Story. That, having buried three Husbands, and all those with a very small portion or quantity of Tears, she came at last to the Grave with her Fourth, for whom she wept bitterly ; which her Neighbors much wondring at, demanded of her the Cause why she should be so immoderate in her Sorrow for that last Husband, who had been of so harsh and rough a Disposition, and so patient at the Deaths of all the other three, who were of loving and affable Natures, and had deserved so well at her hands ? To whom she made this Answer ; That she wept not so much for that she was of her sweet Husband deprived, as that she was now destitute and unprovided ; whereas at the Deaths of her other Husbands, she was ever of another prepared before the other was buried.

To church was my husband born on morow<sup>1</sup>  
With neighbours, that for him made sorow  
And *Jenkin* our clerke—

It is to be wondred why she let him lie so long unburied ; but it seems there was some Solemnity to be used, or else that his Friends and Neighbors did expect it. You may imagine now, when she sees her Sweetheart *Jenkin* amongst other Mourners, that she has made a League with her Eyes, not to shed one Tear ; with her Heart, not to send forth one Sigh, unless it be in jest, and so fool the Spectators. Neat were his Legs, pretty were his Feet : These were her Objects in this Spectacle of Sorrow. This serious Survey or Perusal of *Jenkin's* Person had so taken up her Eye, as it could fix it self on no other Object, while he was in Presence. Yea, her Blood began to sparkle now afresh in her, so as in her own conceit she was twenty years younger than she was in the Morning. Though forty Winters had already blown upon her ; and consequently some Tokens of Age had

<sup>1</sup> To chirehē was myn housbond born a-morwē (l. 593)  
With neighēbores, that for him maden sorwē ;  
And Jankin ourē clerke was oon of tho.

stamp'd their Impressures in her : She had alwaies a Colt's Tooth.  
Yea, she had divers other signs of an Invincible Patient, as she her  
self after confesseth.

Gap tothed I was, and that bicame me wele<sup>1</sup>  
I had the print of dame Venus sele  
As helpe me God, I was a lustie one  
And faire, riche, and yong, and well bigone.

She was gap-tooth'd, or wide-spaced, not like *Pirrhus*, whose  
Teeth were all one Bone, undivided. Though this might seem some  
Deformity, it became her well, even as *Venus* Mole made her more  
lovely : Right Bullion she was, apt for any Impression. Of a lively  
and lusty Nature ; a fresh and lovely Feature ; rich in Fortune ;  
young in her own Opinion ; and every way (as she thought) de-  
serving Affection. In Sense, she was Venereal ; in Heart, Martial ;  
*Venus* gave her the Gift to be lascivious ; *Mars* to be courageous ;  
*Taurus* was her Ascendent, *Mars* therein Predominant : But had  
*Mars* been her Husband, her too common Dalliance might well have  
chang'd *Taurus* into *Aries*, and enjoyn'd him to hold of her for Term  
of Life in *Capite*.

Alas, alas, that ever love was sin.

She bestows the deserving Name of Love upon hateful Lust ; but  
these are to be remarkably distinguished, because their Natures are  
wholly different, as the Poet sometimes well exprest them, in his  
Description of Love.

Love, what's thy Name ? A Phrensie : Whence thy Birth ?  
From Heaven : How comes it then thou liv'st on Earth ?  
I live not there. Yet each usurps thy Name :  
'Tis true indeed, but hence redounds their shame.  
" I live not there, my Nature's pure and just,  
" But Lust lives there, and Love's a Foe to Lust.

This merry Wife of *Bath* could find in her heart, that this Wan-  
tonness of hers, which she terms Love, were no sin ; and pity it is,  
thinks she, that 'tis not so, seeing it affords such sweet self-delight  
to wit, Sense.

I followed aie mine inclination  
Thy vertue of my constellation  
That made me I couth not withdrawe<sup>2</sup>  
My chamber of Venus from a good felawe.

<sup>1</sup> Gat-tothed I was, and that bicam me weel ; (l. 603)

<sup>2</sup> I hadde the prente of sēynt venus seel.

That madē me I couldē nocht withdrewe (l. 617).

Herein our Poet covertly taxeth such who attribute so much unto natural Providence, as though it were inevitable, and thereby use it as a Refuge or Sanctuary, for all their evil Actions. Unto which may be objected the Answer of *Chrisippus*, writing in this manner: Although (saith he) that Nature hath provided all things from the Beginning, and that by her Providence all things are moved and stirred up by a certain necessary Reason and Motion; yet notwithstanding our Dispositions and Minds are no further subject or in danger thereof, than their Propriety and Quality is concordant and agreeable unto the same. For, if by Nature our Wits be first made wholsom and good, apt to receive good Notions, fair Impressions; by being after indued with Reason and Understanding, either they do utterly put off and avoid all evil Influences and accidents, or else by their discreet temper, receive and bear them more easily without hurt or damage. If contrariwise, our dispositions be rude and gross, not endued with any kind of Letters or good Learning, to assist and help them withal, and every light Conflict or Assault of our Natural Inclination, we run headlong into all kind of Errors and Vice. For we ought first to know and understand, that neither the Stars, nor any Natural Influences do provoke or force us to any thing, but only make us apt and prone: And being so disposed, do, as it were, allure and draw us forward to our Natural Inclination. This might be illustrated by example of the *Cylinder-Stone*; which by nature being apt to roll and tumble, and being cast or thrown down into hollow or steep places, doth run without ceasing, not so much because it is cast or thrown, as for his own Nature or Aptness thereunto, and not having any thing in it self to withstand the same.

Yet have I Martes marke upon my face  
And also in another pribie place.

It seems our *Venus* had been at her *Lemnian* Forge; she had got some Marks of her Trade, which she meant to carry with her to her Grave. She confesseth, she never loved with Discretion; for in the whole course of her Trade she never made any distinction. Her Appetite was equally eager to all proper promising persons, were they of what Rank or Fashion soever. The black was admitted as well as the white, the poor as the rich: Her Fort gave way to all Assailants.

What should I say? but at the m<sup>e</sup> <sup>repor</sup>th<sup>s</sup> end<sup>1</sup>  
This joly clerk Jenken, that was <sup>menia</sup> end<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> What sholde I seye, but, at the monthes ende <sup>awe</sup> (l. 6)

<sup>2</sup> Read 'hendē.'



Bath wedded me with great solempnite  
And to him yave I all the londe and fee—

She had past her mourning Month, and now comes in her hony Month, where *Jenkin* is become owner both of her self and her state. What was given her by Age, she as freely bestows upon Youth. Grants of her Lands, Keys of her Chests, all her goods movable and immovable, personal and real, are at his service, without any eviction, molestation, or incumbrance soever. But no sooner restrains he her of her Range, then she repents her of her Gift. Gladly would she have him re-convey it to her, but though he be a meer Scholar, he is no such Gooselin. Now, the Reason why she repents her of what was conferred by her, was this; He begun not only to restrain her, but chastise her.

By God he smote me ones with his fist<sup>1</sup>  
For that I rent out of his booke a lefe  
That of that stroke, my eres wex defe.

As if she should thus say, Who would have thought that this smooth-chinn'd Princock, but new-come from Schole, should thus begin to scourge me, who have had the Schooling and Scourging of four antient Benchers? Admit I rent a Leaf out of his Book, when the Story did discontent me, must he presently fall to his Rubber of Cuffs, and so be reveng'd on me? Well, though this quaint Clerk fell aboard so roughly with me; I think I gave him his Penny-worths; Judge you that hear me. Never was Lioness more fierce, nor Jay more jangling. Though he labour'd to restrain me, in despite of him I took my Liberty. From house to house went I Gossiping. Neither his Oaths nor Anger could wean me from mine humor.

For which full oft time would he preache<sup>2</sup>  
And me of old Roman jestes teache.

He ply'd me with Lectures out of old *Roman* Stories for his own purpose: Amongst which, he told me, how one *Sulpitius Gallus* utterly forsook his Wife, for shewing her self but once openly at the Door, and taking a view of Passengers as they went by. Also, how another *Roman* (*Novellus Torquatus*; or I mistake it) wholly relinquish'd his Wife, for making resort to a Summer Game without his Knowledg. And how *Plutarch* (whose Authority might more pro-

<sup>1</sup> By god he smoot me onēs on the list, (l. 634)

That thed e strook myn erē wex al deef. (l. 636).

<sup>2</sup> For ile the p<sup>r</sup> often tymēs woldē preche, (l. 641)  
And madē me f<sup>r</sup> Romayn gestēs teche.

perly be alledged in this Argument) affirmeth that it is a Custom in *Egypt*, that Women should wear no Shoes, because they should abide at home. Then would he confirm these antient Stories with Holy Writ, and shew how *Ecclesiast.* gives express Charge to all Husbands, that they should in no wise suffer their Wives to wander or stray abroad; knitting up his goodly Precepts and Examples with this shrewd Proverb;

Whoso buildeth his hous all of salowes<sup>1</sup>  
And pricketh his blind hors over the falowes  
And suffreth his wife for to seche hallowes  
He is worthy to be honged on the gallowes.

Sallows are but mean Timber-wood to build on; Fallows are uneven grounds for a blind Horse to ride on: And Hallows or Pilgrimages dangerous Waies for young Wives to go on. The first shews Imprudence, the second Rashness, the last Weakness.\*

But all for nought, I set nat an hawe<sup>2</sup>  
Of his proverbes, ne of his old sawe  
Ne I would not of him corrected be  
I hate him that my vices telleth me.

But all these goodly Precepts and Proverbs which he delivered in this sort unto me, were but as if he had sown Dust in the Air. I valued them not worth the Bloom of a Haw-thorn. For truth was, those who either corrected me, or reprov'd those Vices which they saw in me, were never after Cater-cosins with me; for such Vices as we love, we defend; nor can we easily forgo them without Distast.

Now woll I saie you soth by S. Thomas  
Why that I rent out of his booke a lefe  
For which he smote me, that I was defe.

The Book out of which I tore this Leaf, was entituled *Valerius Max.* a Roman Author, one who wrote much to our Reproof and Dishonour. With him had he joyned *Theophrastus*, at whose Conceits, he unmeasurably laughed, while I at his Laughter was grievously nettled. With these had he bound up *St. Jerom's* Book

<sup>1</sup> "Who-so that buildeth his hous al of salwës, (l. 655)  
And priketh his blindë hors over the falwës,  
And suffreth his wyf to go seken halwës,  
Is worthy to been hangen on the galwës!"

\* Conventicles are Tickle places for Holy Sisters; Those are Booths for such Ware, as I could wish all young Bridegrooms to beware of: St. ——— is rather a Sanctuary for our Aunts than Saints. A place reported by *Borgius* for a frequent Receipt of Pilgrins; *Pomerius* in his *Summanian Annals.* (R. B.)

<sup>2</sup> But al for noght, I settë noght an hawe (l. 659).  
Of his proverbes n'of his oldë sawë

against the Heretick *Jovinian*, together with *Tortulanus*, *Crisippus*, *Tortula*, and *Helowis*, sometimes Abbess not far from *Paris*. And with these (to enlarge this his Miscellane Volume) had he bound together the Parables of *Solomon*, *Ovid* his Art of Loving, with sundry other Tracts or Treatises, discoursing of several Subjects. Now, would you know how he employed these Books? It was his accustomed manner every night when he had Leisure, to recreate himself in these Works: More Legends and Lives had he of wicked Wives, than ye could repeat of good Wives throughout the Bible. All these had he purposely compiled, and were by him nightly recounted to make me discontented.

For trusteth well, it is an impossible  
That any clerke would speake good of wibes  
But if it been of holy saintes libes—

It is not now as it was in *Chaucer's* daies; Present times have Clarks, who can approve and love this Sex. Such, I say, as having proper Liniments to woo with, natural Habiliments to win with, Canonical Faculties of their own to wed with, become no Reprovers, but Improvers of so Honourable a State. Wherein I hold them wise; Sure I am, they trace the steps of the wise: For all the Seven wise men of *Greece* were married: Albeit; there never wanted in any Age scornful Inveighers against women, yea, and Persecuters of them too in publick Theatres; Such were *Euripides*, *Hesiodus*, with many others, who out of some bitter Experience had of their own unhappy Choice, made that Sex, now and then, the Subject of their Invection. It was a Stoick's Saying, No wise man was fit for a Woman, yet may a Woman be fit for a wise man; yea, and fit him too a Penniworth for all his Wisdom. But if a Woman would have Hearts-ease, and world at will, let her marry one of our Sedentary-Desk Clarks, or Pedantical Fools, who know not what the world means; for so may she have the world at will. Now in the very last Verse mentioned by our Poet, this good wife of *Bath* shadows out such jealous Clarks; who, when they suspect their Wives affected to Company, or any way addicted to Liberty, they will pull out some antient Story or other, discoursing of the Lives of Saintly or Holy Women, to reclaim them from their Gadding, and restrain them in their Freedom of living.

He of none other woman never the mo  
Who peinteth the Lion, tell me who? <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Who peyntedē the leoun, tel me who? (l. 692)

By God, if women had written stories<sup>1</sup>  
As clerkes han, within her oratories &c.

These Clarks (saith she) are of that condition as they will neither speak well of Wives nor any other Women. But they can paint a Lion that never saw his Feature, but by Report; This is but only as it pleaseth the Painter. Had women written Stories (as our *Theano*, with many moe Mirrors of our Sex could have done) they would have found Colours to display the vicious Natures of men, and discovered them guilty of more Enormities than the Issue-Male of Adam should ever redress.

The children of Mercury and Venus<sup>2</sup>  
Been in her working full contrarious.

A Contrariety there is in the workings of *Mercury* and *Venus*. The Objects at which they aim their several Faculties, are wholly opposite. *Mercury* is for Wisdom and Speculation; *Venus* for Riot and Sensual Meetings. Yea, their Dispositions are likewise divers; for, Exaltation of the one is the Humiliation of the other; which (as if this good-wife had been well read in an *Erra-Pater*, or some other Astronomical Author) she confirms with this Instance:

And thus God wote, Mercury is desolate  
In Pisces, where Venus is exaltate  
And Venus falleth where Mercury is reised  
Therefore no woman of no clerke is preised.

*Mercury* and *Venus* are ever in Opposition.

For true it is, Employment hath no time  
To offer Sacrifice to Venus Shrine.

Elegantly shadowed by *Lucian*, feigning *Cupid's* Encounter with the Muses: "For he that converseth with his Mind, by whose Eye "the Body is directed, will not intermit his Affairs, to have his Mind "with Lust infected. *Mercury* admits himself no time to take a "Turn in *Venus* Walk.

The clerke whan he is old, and may nought do  
Of Venus werkes, not worth his old sho.<sup>3</sup>

Long Study hath brought him to the *Sciatica*. He hath so inur'd himself to the Speculative Part, as he is wholly out of use with the Practick. The Remainder of his daies (saith she) he spends like a Cricket, in a Chimney-Corner, in descanting on the Lightness of VVomens Natures, wherein he shews the poorness of his own Humor.

<sup>1</sup> By God, if women haddē writen stories (l. 693).

<sup>2</sup> The children of Mercurie and of Venus (l. 697).

<sup>3</sup> Of Venus werkēs worth his oldē sho. (l. 708).



But now to purpose, why I told thee<sup>1</sup>  
 That I was beaten for a booke parde  
 Upon a night Jenkin, that was our sire  
 Redde upon his booke, as he sate by the fire<sup>2</sup>  
 Of Eve first &c.

But would you know (quoth she) more at large the cause of my Beating? I will now return to my Purpose, and fully relate to you the Occasion. Sir *Jenkin* (as he accustomedly used) having laid his Heel on the Ratting Crook, to pass the Winternight away, or rather, as I expounded it, to disquiet me, took a Book in his Hand, (a various Volume of Numerous Authors) wherein he read of *Eve* first, how she by consenting to the Serpent, brought all Mankind to the Brink of Perdition. Which mortal Sore requir'd a Sovereign Salve, even the Blood of the Lamb, which regained Man, before lost, and restored our Blood, before corrupted.

To here expresse of women may ye find  
 That woman was the losse of all mankind.

*Jenkin* applies the Text he had read; but few or none of all his She-Audience will vouchsafe to make Use of his Application. But to the end he may work stronger upon his Wives Phantasie, he brings on a fresh Army of Examples in this kind. What did treacherous *Dalilah* to her *Sampson*, when by discovery of his Counsel, she robb'd him of his Hairs, wherein lay all his Strength; and after, of his Eyes, which gave him all his Light? What did *Deianira* to her *Hercules*, when with *Nessus* poysoned Shirt, she set him all a fire? VVhat did *Zantippe* to *Socrates*, when she crown'd him with a Chamber-pot? which shameless Abuse of hers, when such as were his Friends, wished him to revenge, he washed off his Disgrace with this Patient Answer:

*It never yet was deem'd a Wonder  
 To think that Rain should follow Thunder.*

She thundred so much before with her Tongue, as he could expect no less than Rain. What did *Pasiphae* Wife to *Minos* of *Crete*, whose Brutish Lust, and Monstrous Birth, have made her infamous to all succeeding times? What did *Clytemnestra* to her *Agamemnon*? What Dishonour did she to her Noble Parents *Tindarus* and *Leda*, when she not only expos'd her self to *Ægistus*

<sup>1</sup> . . . why I told thee. (l. 711).

<sup>2</sup> Redde on his book as he sat by the fyre, (l. 714).  
 Of Eva first, that for her wikkednesse, (l. 715).

Lust, but depriv'd her Princely Husband of Life? What did *Eriphyle* Wife of *Amphiaraus*, when for a Gold-Chain, she disloyally betrayed her Husband *Polynices*, when he had hidden himself, because he would not go to the Wars of *Thebes*? What Dispatch made *Livia* of her Husband, because she lov'd him too little? What Dispatch made *Lucilia* of hers, because she loved him too much? What Answer received *Latumerus* of *Arrius* (a Philosopher in *Alexandria*, in *Augustus* time) when he made his sorrowful Complaint unto him, how that he had a Tree in his Garden of such a strange Nature, as all his three wives, through meer despight, had hang'd themselves on it? O (quoth surly *Arrius*) do me the Courtesie, Dear Brother, to give me a Plant of that Blessed Tree, that it may grow and prosper in my Garden: For never did any yet plant it, that might make better use of it. What Wives in these later times do we now read of, who not only consented to see their Husbands murdered, but in the very Presence of those dislaughtered Corps suffered themselves to be defiled? Some have driven Nails through their Brains; Others have depriv'd them of Life by poysonous Potions: As might be instanced in the Tragick Examples of *Drusilla*, *Faustina*, *Corom-bona*, *Messalina*, and many others. All which Stories Sir *Jenkin* would read so distinctly, passionately, and devoutly, as if they were his Evening Orizons.

And therewithall he knew no proverbes<sup>1</sup>  
Than in this world there groweth grasse or herbes.

He was a most proper Proverbial *Jenkin*, and could twit his testy Wife with store of such Proverbs as these, which he had at his Finger end. "It is better to live with Lions and Dragons, than in "house with an angry woman. Better to abide on the Roof ever "smoking, than below with a Wife ever chiding. Yea, so perverse, "(said he) are they in Will, so contrary in Work, that they ever "hate what their Husbands love, like what they loath. They cast "away Shame, when they cast off their Smock. And for their "Modesty, this is my Opinion, To see Beauty accompanied by "Chastity, were like a Gold Ring in a Swine's Snout.

Who coude wene, or who coude suppose<sup>2</sup>  
The wo, that in mine hart was and pine  
And whan I saw he would never fyne

<sup>1</sup> And ther-with-al, he knew of no proverbes. (l. 773).

<sup>2</sup> Who woldë wenen, or who woldë suppose (l. 786)

The wo that in myn hertë was, & pyne?

And whan I saugh he woldë never fyne.

To reden on this cursed booke all night  
 All sodainly thre leues hane I plight  
 Out of his booke —

How much this Good-wife was netled with his Nightly Lectures, she can hardly express her self, much less her Interpreter. Howsoever, one may easily collect by those furious Sparks of her Passion which issue forth, that there is a dangerous Fire within. For first, she takes a poor Revenge on his Book, and tears it; Then she collars with him, and with a sound blow oth' Ear, throws him down backward into the Fire. Which he, never till now inflam'd with such unmanly Fury, requites with such a stroke on her Head, as senseless she falls on the Floor. Die she will needs, there's no Remedy; and the rather, as may be imagined, to make him guilty of her Death, and so raise him to the Ladder of his *Suspended* Advancement. But coming now at last to her self (for long had she been by her self) in this sort she re-assaies to course him, before she leave him.

Oh, hast thou slair me false thefe I saied  
 For my lond thus hast thou mured me?<sup>1</sup>  
 Er I be dedde, yet woll I ones kisse thee.

Though she approach near the Gates of Death, she can open the Gate of her Teeth, and make the Poet's Observation true,

*Wheel of a Womans Tongue is like a River,  
 Set it once going, it will go for ever.*

Well; It seems, before her Departure, she means to give him a strange Encounter. Sirrah Thief, do you hear! You that first enchanted me, and so ravish'd my Love from me; you that have seiz'd of what was due to me: Nay, you Blood-hound, you that for my Land have thus murdered me, draw near me, let me kiss thee, and so good night to all the world. It shall not be said, but I die in Charity; So, close up mine Eyes, I shall die presently. This dying Salute could not chuse but drive poor *Jenkin* into sundry Extreame. For, thought he, should she die in spite after this manner, I should make a fair End, but a worse Face in an Halter. Gladly would he (if she were not past hope) recover her; Down on his knees he goes, and kisses her; rubs and chafes her; though she needed small Chafing, being as hot at Stomach, as any Pepper. In the end, he resolves to salute her, and if her Stomach be come down, to reconcile

<sup>1</sup> And for my land thus hastow mured me? (l. 801).  
 'Er I be deed, yet wol I kisse thee.'

himself to her ; but still he fears, she is either nearly dead, or wholly deaf to such an Humor.

And nere he came, and kneled faire adoun  
 And saied, dere suster, swete Alisoun<sup>1</sup>  
 As helpe me God I shall thee neuer smite  
 That I haue doen it is thy self to wite  
 Forgebe it me, and that I thee beseke  
 And yet eft sones I hit him on thee cheke—

A right fair and proper Acknowledgment of his Offence : If she will but forgive him this rash and unadvis'd Assault, may he never desire any Favour, nor deserve any Love from her, nor in his greatest need receive any Succour, if ever he attempt any such presumptuous part thereafter. And yet alas (saith he) it was your Fault that we fell into this Debate : Had you rul'd your Tongue, I had held mine Hand ; yet forgive it me, dear Sister, sweet *Alyson*, and I promise you, upon *Jenkin's* Honesty, that your Tongue shall never force me to like Fury. While poor *Jenkin* is thus labouring in all humble manner to compose his own Peace, the dead Coarse revives, and fetcheth him such an overthwart Blow, as his Head rings again. Which (good man) sounds better in his Ear, than ever any of her sweet Kisses relished his Lip ; For, thought he, if she have such lightness in her fingers, she cannot but have some Liveliness at her heart.

And saied : these, thus moch am I bewreke<sup>2</sup>  
 How wol I die, I may no lenger speke.

Like the humorous Lady in the Comedy, she is every foot dying, to make him the more despairing ; Though she had already wreaked her self of him sufficiently, yet will she die with this Revenge, in spite of all his Remorse. And to confirm, that she is near Death, she concludes, "I may no longer speak : A dangerous Sign that she is past all hope of Recovery. For when a woman is laid speechless, the Bell may well ring out. But see what a bright Beam darted forth of this black Cloud !

— At last, with mikell care and wo  
 We fell accorded within our seluen two<sup>3</sup>  
 He gaf me all the bridell in mine hond  
 To haue the gouernaunce of hous & lond  
 And of his tongue and of his hond also  
 And made hem brenne his book anon tho.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> And seyde, 'dere suster Alisoun,— (l. 804).

<sup>2</sup> And seyde, 'theef, thus muchel am I wreke. (l. 809).

<sup>3</sup> We fille accorded, by us selven two. (l. 812).

<sup>4</sup> And made him brenne his book anon right tho. (l. 816).



The world is well amended with Dame *Alyson*; She was even now for giving up the Ghost; but holding it far better, upon some reasonable tearms, to live than die, she is content to take heart of Grease, and live a while longer; Provided, she may have the Bridle in her own hand, the Government of his Estate, the Command of his Tongue and hand; and lastly, that she may burn this Apocryphal Book, which bred all this Variance and Debate: To all which he accords, and so the Peace is made. A very beneficial Peace for *Jenkin*, albeit upon hard Tearms: For by this means, became all Occasions of future Difference prevented, a shrewd Dame to a peaceable Wife changed. And to HER no less useful, being for term of life, of all his Estate without any Compartner, absolutely seized. Never from that time did any Wife from *Denmark* to *India* (to take her own Compass) live with Husband in more Unity, nor shew truer Arguments of Constancy, than she did to her *Jenkin*, and all this without Hypocrisie.

— And so was he to me  
 I pray to God, that sitte in Maiestie  
 To blisse his soule, for his mercy dere<sup>1</sup>  
 Now woll I say my tale if ye woll here.

One True-Love Knot betwixt them both: So faithful was his Love to her till the End, as she cannot chuse but remember his Soul in her Prayers after his End. After which Orizon, she makes ready to tell her Tale.

The Frere lough whan he had heard all this  
 Now dame (qd he) so haue I joy or blis  
 This is a long preamble of a tale.

The Frier, amongst others of her attentive Audience, starts up, and jeers this good Wife of *Bath*, for making so long a Preamble to her Tale, which, for ought that he knew, might prove as short; and so resemble the *Mindian* Building, who, for making large Gates to a little City, were scornfully advised by that Cynick *Diogenes*, to be very circumspect and wary lest their City should run out at their Gates.

And whan the Sompner herd the frere gale  
 To (qd this Sompner) by Goddes arms two<sup>2</sup>  
 A Frere woll entermete him euermo  
 To good men,<sup>3</sup> a flie and eke a Frere  
 Woll fall in euery dish and eke matere.

<sup>1</sup> So blesse his soulë, for his mercy dere! (l. 827)

<sup>2</sup> 'Lo!' quod the Somnour, 'goddës armës two!' (l. 833).

<sup>3</sup> Lo, godë men, . . . (l. 835).

In defence of her, and opposition to the Frier, up stands the Sumner; who reproves the Frier for interrupting this Good-wife in her Tale; as if he should say, Marry Duck Sir Frier, Must you be ever intermeddling in others Affairs? You will have an Oar, I see, in every one's Boat: and make that old Proverb good: *A Fly and a Frier will fall in every man's Dish and Matter*. What have you, Sir Frier, to do with her Preambulations? Whether she amble or trot it concerns you nothing. You hinder our Sport; Sit down, and give her way.

He wolt thou so sir Sompner (qd the Frere)  
Now by my fay I shall, or er I go  
Tell of a Sompner such a tale or two  
That all the folke shall laugh in this place.<sup>1</sup>

What, Sir Sumner, are you so malapert? Must you control a Frier? Well! For your grave Reproof, I shall, before we part, tell a Tale or two of a Sumner, that will give Occasion enough of Laughter.

Now els Frere I beshrew thy face<sup>2</sup>  
(Quod this Sompner) and I beshrew<sup>3</sup> me  
But if I tell<sup>4</sup> tales two or thre  
Of Freres ———

The Sumner will not abate the Frier an Ace. He has a Tale or two to bestow on the Frier, and to fit him with his own Cool, before they come to *Syttingbourn*, towards which they were journeying. He sees his Patience already netled, and he hopes, when it comes to his Turn to tell his Tale, the Frier will not find himself much refreshed.

Our host cried peace —

Like a peaceable Moderator, our Host, who was the very first Mover and Contriver of this Task, cries Peace. Let the woman go on (quoth he) with her Tale; How is it, that you fare as if you were drunk? You trouble us; Revenge your Distasts on one another in your Tales, when your time comes; If you prepare, we shall hear. Then turning himself to this Wife of *Bath*, he persuades her to go on, in these words;

Doe dame, tell forth your tale, and that is best  
All redy sir (qd she) right as you lest

<sup>1</sup> That alle the folk shal laughen in this place. (l. 843).

<sup>2</sup> Now ellës, Frerë, I bishrewë thy face' (l. 844).

<sup>3</sup> Read 'bishrewë.'

<sup>4</sup> Read 'tellë.'

If I haue licence of this worthy Frier  
Yes dame, tell forth your tale, I woll it here.<sup>1</sup>

Go to Dame, let not their jarring trouble you. You know what you have to do ; I hold it best, that you go on with your Tale. I am ready (saith she) to obey your will, provided that I may have this worthy Frier's Leave, whose Patience I have so far abus'd with my long Preface ; which, although it solace not him, it gave me that Delight, as I could have travell'd farther in this Discourse, and never been tired. At last, with the Frier's Permission, and Promise of Attention, she goes on with her Tale, in this sort.

<sup>1</sup> 'Yis dame,' quod he, 'tel forth, and I wol here.' (l. 856).



## A Comment upon the Wife of Bathes Tale.

**I**n the old daies of king Artour<sup>1</sup>  
(Of which the Bretons spoken great honour —

Prince Arthur, the Son of Vther, born in *Cornwal*, was Crowned King of *Britain* in the Year 516. He was a Prince, for Spirit no less Courageous, than in all his Attempts Victorious. His Courage proclaimed him a man, and his good Fortune an happy man. He fought twelve several Battels against the *Saxons*, and alwaies returned Conqueror. And having now to his succeeding memory reduced his Countrey to quietness, and planted the Peaceful Olive in his Confines; to express his true Love to Chivalry, and memorize such who were not only Associates, but Assistants in his Victory; He constituted the Order of the Round Table, in which Order, he only retained such of his Nobility, as were most Renowned for Vertue and Chivalry. This Round Table he kept in divers places, especially at *Carlion*, *Winchester*, and *Camalet* in *Somersetshire*. In memory of which Foundation, by the Testimony of *Leyland*, there is yet to be seen in *Denbighshire*, in the Parish of *Llansavan*, in the side of a Stony Hill, a place artificially compos'd, wherein be four and twenty Seats for men to sit in, some less, and some bigger, according to their several Statures; cut out of the main Rock by man's Hand; where young people coming to seek their Cattel, use to sit, play, and repose: They commonly call it *Arthur's Round Table*. To insist on those Fabulous Relations which former times have broached touching this Prince, I will not, but refer them, who take delight in the Report of such Wonders, to our Old Wives Legends. Let it suffice them, that in this King's daies (if they will take the word of a good Old Wife of *Bath*)

All was this lond fulfilled of fairy<sup>2</sup>  
The Elfe quene, with her joly company &c.

<sup>1</sup> In tholdē dayēs of the king Arthour, (l. 1).

<sup>2</sup> All was this land fulfilled of fayeryē. (l. 3).



King *Oberon*, Queen *Mab*, Prince *Cricket*, and his Paramour *Pig-Widgeon*, with all their fair Company, used to repair hither, and dance a Cinque-pace upon the Meads, (if they had so much Art among them) Yea, by usual resorting and consorting together, they became so familiar with our Milkmaids on the Downs, as they would not only sport with them, but woo them and win them; whence the Poet:

Pug wooed Jug, a wily Cuh,  
To drink with him a Sillibub,  
Which drunk, they so familiar grew,  
As Jug became one of the Crew.

But this (saith our Wife of *Bath*) was many hundred Years ago. King *Oberon's* Race is quite extinct and gone, or else confin'd to some other remote Island, where they reside. And she gives a Reason of this.

For there as wont to walk<sup>1</sup> was an Elfe.  
There walketh now the limitour himselfe.

\*Limitors and holy Friars supply the Place of Fairies. Their Orizons, Anthems and Prayers have conjur'd down all Fayries. Before times, young Wenches durst not safely go by themselves: Every Bush had his Hob-thrush, but the world is well amended.

Women may go safely by and down  
In every bush, and under every tre  
There nis no other incubus but he.

Safe and secure may now our Maids be. No *Incubus*, Goblin, or Night-mare shroud themselves in the Bushy Thickets to surprize them, or with a cold Sweat in the Nighttimes to oppress them: The devout Frier hath scar'd them. There is no other *Incubus* but he. Neither need they fear any Dishonour; for nothing but holy Honesty attends the Frier.

And so fell it,<sup>2</sup> that this king Artour  
Had in his house a lusty bachelor.

Amongst others of his Princely Retinue, for whom only this brave Victorious Prince reserved his *Round Table*, one Lusty Youth there was in his Court, who giving Reins to his Desire, encountred a young amorous Maid, and ravish'd her; The Report of this Rape within few daies came to King *Arthur's* Ear, who, to expiate the Guilt of

<sup>1</sup> Read 'walken.'

\* *A Proprias Limites Terris imponendo, & remouentibus Anathemata denunciando dicti, ut veresimile est.* (R. B.)

<sup>2</sup> And so befel it, &c. (l. 26).

so foul a Crime, and free his Royal Court of all Dishonour, denounced upon this wanton Courtier due Censure: Which Censure (as may be probably conceived) was grounded upon the Statute then, as now in Force; That he who committed any Rape should suffer Death. Albeit, in those daies, an especial kind of Death was inflicted on the Ravisher, and that was, he should lose his Head; to counterpoize this Offence, in depriving another of her Maiden-head.

But that the Quene, and other ladies mo  
So long prayden the king of grace<sup>1</sup>  
Till he his life graunted in that place  
And gaue him to the quene —

As it hath been ever accounted the highest Honour for Knights to afford succour and relief to distressed Ladies, so hath it been the custum of Noble and Affable Ladies to commiserate the Miss-fortunes or Overtures of dejected Knights. Such Favour found this young Gentleman at the Hands of his Queen and her Ladies: who, no sooner heard of this Judgment of Death pronounced upon him, than with Prayers and Tears (prevalent Suitors to a compassionate Prince) they labour'd to reverse that Sentence, and afford some comfort to his approaching Ruine. As they pray'd, so they prevail'd; The King (a Mirror in his time, both for Justice and Mercy) gives this Knight's Life to his Queen, to dispose of, as shall best like her. Nor need he fear ought else than a gracious Usage at her Hands, from whose Sollicitancy he had received his Reprieve, if not Reversal of Judgment.

The quene thanketh the king with all her might  
And after this, thus spake she to the knight &c.

The Queen, after due thanks rendered unto the King, for speeding so well in her Suit, takes Opportunity to talk with this Knight; and tels him how, indeed, by her means, she had procur'd his Reprieve for a time; but yet he was not to hold himself safe nor secure from danger. His Life was given her, and she would bestow it on him, provided that he performed what she propounded, and assoiled what she demanded.

I graunt thee thy life, if that thou canst tell me<sup>2</sup>  
What thing is it, that women most desiren  
Beware, and kepe thy necke bone from the iren.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> So longē preyēden the king of gracē; (l. 39)

Til he his lyf him graunted in the placē.

<sup>2</sup> I graunte thee lyf, if thou canst tellen me (l. 48).

<sup>3</sup> Be war, and keep thy nekkē-boon from yrēn. (l. 50).

A necessary Caution for this condemned Gentleman. As if she should say, Go to Sir, your Fact was hainous, for which you have here your Sentence. The Sentence of Death, you know, to be already pronounced; to attemper the sharpness of which Censure, I have interceded for you; and so far prevailed, as it is now in my hands whether you live or die. Nor is my Brest so steeled, as altogether insensible of Compassion. Yet must such a Crime as you have committed, sustain the difficulty of some Task before it be remitted. This Question then you must resolve me, if ever you mean to expect any Favour from me. It concerns our Sex, as from our Sex you are to acknowledg the Benefit of your Life.

And if thou canst not tell it me anon  
 Yet woll I yene the lene for to gon  
 A twelue month and a day, to seke and lere  
 An answer sufficient in this matere.

If the Question seem too intricate, I will give you a twelve-moneths time to consider of it; yet with Sureties for your Return at the Years end. Go to, this is all the Favour I will shew you.

Who was the knight, and sorowfully he siketh.

Mightily perplexed was this distressed Knight; but seeing there is no Remedy, but he must either assoil this Question, or despair of Safety; he prepares himself for his Journey. Wherein, you may suppose, what Coasts he frequents, with what people of all Qualities and Conditions he consorts; he leaves no place unsought, where he conceives the least hope that this Question may be assoil'd.

But he ne couth ariven in no cost  
 Where as he might find in this matere<sup>1</sup>  
 Two creatures according yfere.

As many Men so many Minds. A whole College of Physicians had not more different Opinions; Nor all the antient Philosophers more discrepant Tenets concerning Felicity. Some said it was Riches that did most delight them. Others thought Honours did most content them. Others held that Gorgeous Attire did highest take them. Some said Mirth, others said Delight in Bed, others to be Widows oft. Some, and those of the self-same Sex (for who knows better their hearts than themselves) taking compassion of this poor perplexed Knight, and desirous to satisfie him in what they could, unriveted the very Secrets of their own Brests, and told him

<sup>1</sup> Wher-as he mighte finde in this matere (l. 67)  
 Two creatures accordinge in-fere.

plainly what of all things in the world they for their parts most desired, and what of all others most contented them. For my part, said one, there is nought that delights me more, than to have Hearts-ease, to be cheared, cherished, flattered and pleas'd; ever to have my Words seconded, my Arguments maintained, and in all my Business to have my self duly attended. Another of the same Sex, and for her Opinion, by all likelihood of the same Seet, starts up, and affirms; That for her part, she lov'd nothing better, than to be free and at her own Dispose; to be countermanded by none, to do what she list; not to be reproved for any Vice that she loved; to be esteemed wise; more free than nice; more buxom than precise.

For trewely there nis none of us all<sup>1</sup>  
If any wight woll clawe us on the gall<sup>2</sup>  
That we will kike —

Here this Good-wife of *Bath* puts in her Vye, and confirms their Opinion, who held that nothing delighted a Woman more than to be soothed, seconded, and humored. For whosoever (saith she) use to claw us on the Gall, or nettle us, they shall find us to have Stomachs. We cannot endure to be controlled; give us the Swinge, or they that oppose us, are sure to be swung. Again, If we be subject to any Vice, we cannot brook that any other's Eye should prie into our Bosoms. When we are lightest, we desire to be held demurest; when most Vitious, to be reputed most Vertuous. They are lov'd most by us, who defend our Vices; They offend us most, who stile not our Vices Vertues.

And some men sain,<sup>3</sup> that grete delite haue we  
For to ben holde stable and eke secree<sup>4</sup>  
And in one purpose stedfastly to dwell<sup>5</sup>  
And not bewray thing that men us tell.<sup>6</sup>

Here she proceeds in the Delivery of their several Opinions; when she shews, how some held it their highest Delight to be esteemed constant in their Courses, secret in their Counsels; to hold their first purpose immutably, and to conceal whatsoever was recommended to their Secreey. But how lightly (saith she) we of our Sex

<sup>1</sup> For trewely, ther is noon of us allē. (l. 83).

<sup>2</sup> Read 'gallē.'

<sup>3</sup> And sommē seyn, &c. (l. 89).

<sup>4</sup> For to ben holden stable and eek secree (l. 90).

<sup>5</sup> Read 'dwellē.'

<sup>6</sup> And nat biwreyē thing that men us tellē. (l. 92).



set by keeping of Counsel, that Fable of \* *Midas*, reported by *Ovid*, will sufficiently discover.

——— Toll ye here the tale:  
 Onide, among other things small<sup>1</sup>  
 Said, *Midas* had vnder his long heerres  
 Growing on his heed, two asses ears.

*Mida*, quasi Μηδὲν ἔιωλον, because his Eies were blinded or filmed with Covetousness. He was King of *Phrygia*, and one of the richest that ever reign'd. The Poets feign, that after he had restored *Silenus* unto *Bacchus*, to gratifie his Courtesie, *Bacchus* promised him what Gift soever he should demand; Upon which Offer, he desired that whatsoever he touched, might be into Gold turned. By which means, the very Meat which was provided for his Repast, became Gold; so as, though he surfetted in Gold, he famish'd for Food. Well then deserved he an Asses Ears for his Labour, who could not satisfie his Desires without starving Nature. Now to cover this Deformity (as may be supposed) he wore purposely long Hair, so as none know of it, save only his Wife, whom he especially trusted, and to whose Secrecy those long Ears of his were only disclosed. She, who had solemnly vow'd never to disclose what he had recommended to her Trust; both to keep her Oath, and yet disgorge her Stomach of that Secret, which lay so fretting and frying on her, as she must needs be delivered of it; resolved one day to go down to a Marish near adjoyning, far remote from the sight or search of man; where, just like as a Bittern puts his Beak in a Reed, and through the hollowness of the Cane makes a shrill and sharp sound, so lay *Midas* Wife with her Mouth to the Water, using these Words; *Dost thou hear, thou Marish? my Husband has a pair of Asse's Ears; This is a Secret, none but my self knows of it; I would not for a world impart it. So, now my Heart is eased: My Lace would have broke, if I had not disclos'd it.*

The remnaunt of the tale, if ye will here  
 Redeth Onide, and there ye may it lere.

This Story you may read in the Eleventh Book of his *Metamorphosis*, where the Reason of this Transformation is lively expressed.

\* *Bacchus* Bounty so freely bestowed, was not so discreetly employed by *Midas*, as *Neptune's* Gifts were by *Theseus*: This brought *Midas* to the Brink of Misery: Those wrought *Theseus* safe Delivery. (R. B.)

<sup>1</sup> Ovyde, amonges othere thinges smalē, (l. 96)  
 Seyde, Myda haddē, under his longe herēs,  
 Growinge up-on his heed two asses erēs.

This knight, of which my tale is specially  
 Than that he sawe, he might not come thereby  
 This is to say, what woman louen most  
 Within his herte sorowful was his goste, &c.<sup>1</sup>

Many Coasts and Countries had this distressed Knight search'd,  
 sundry Folkes Judgments and Opinions had he sought, yet is he no  
 nearer, than when he began. Different were their Conceits, accord-  
 ing to the Difference of their Minds. Nothing was definitely con-  
 cluded, because their Judgments were so diversly distracted. On  
 draws the time, in which his Summons calls him home; which, rather  
 than he will not keep, in regard of those dear Friends Words engaged  
 for him, he resolves to suffer a thousand Deaths. Thus perplexed,  
 wanders this Pilgrim Knight, hopeless of any Resolve for his  
 Question, and consequently out of all hope to procure his Pardon.

But home he goth, he might not sojourne<sup>2</sup>  
 The day was come, he must home returne  
 And in his way, it hapned him to ride  
 In all his care, under a forest side  
 Where he saw upon a daunce go<sup>3</sup>  
 Of ladies foure and twenty, and yet mo &c.

Amidst these distracted Cares of his, as he travels homeward (for  
 approached was the time of his Return, with a general Expectance of  
 his Resolve) as he casts his troubled Eye aside, he sees a Company  
 of dainty and delicate Ladies, Sylvanes or Wood-Nymphs all, leading  
 a pleasant Dance near to the Forrest side; Towards them he address-  
 eth his Course, in hope to receive some Comfort from them. But to  
 increase his Anguish, no sooner draws he near them, than they vanish.

No creature saw he that bare life  
 Save in the grene, he saw sitting an old wife<sup>4</sup>  
 A fouler wight there may no man devise.

Beauty was gone, and Deformity left. All those amiable Ladies  
 were quite vanished; and none remaining but an old Hag, whose  
 sight begot in him more Loathing than Loving. Those, whom former  
 times have painted out for the most ugly, and worst-favoured Creatures  
 that ever breathed; even *Nays*, *Catastes*, *Thestylis*, were dainty Para-  
 gons in Nature.\*

<sup>1</sup> With-inne his brest ful sorowful was the goost; (l. 130).

<sup>2</sup> But hoom he gooth, he might nat solourne. (l. 131)

The day was come, that hoomward moste he tourne,

<sup>3</sup> Wher-as he saugh up-on a daunce go— (l. 135).

<sup>4</sup> Save on the grene he saugh sittinge a wyf; (l. 142).

\* This Mother-Midnight, shap'd like a *Sweden* Hag, and by all likelihood  
 the *Fayries* Midwife. (R. B.)

Again the knight the old wife gan arise.<sup>1</sup>

A proper Salute, and as mannerly a Regreet, you may expect, as an old Trot of her shape could afford. For thus she seems to accost him: 'God may you bless, young Gentleman; for you look 'like a bonny gameson Youth. What way bound you so fast down 'by this uncouth Forrest? Sure, if I miss not my Mark, you are 'out of your Aim; for this is no High-way; Sooth in God, there is 'somewhat or other, that gripes you by th' Heart; for your fresh 'flowry Countenance looks pale. Is it Love, a God's Name, or some 'sike giddy thing that girds you?

— Tell me what ye seken by your fay<sup>2</sup>  
Peradventure it may the better be  
This old folke conne much thing (qd she)

We old Trots are good for something. We have many fine Medicines in store, that lustier Hussies little wot on. Read your Rede to me then boldly, you shall find me an honest old woman; And a true trusty Friend in a Corner, though she be never so ore-spent by Nature, may do a Buxsom Boy a Pleasure.

My lefe mother (qd this knight) certaine  
I nam but deed, but if that I can sain  
What thing it is, that women most desire  
Coud ye me wisse, I wold quite well your hire.<sup>3</sup>

His time limited is so short, and so speedy his Task, as it admits no delay. He discovers unto her the reason of his Raunge in that desert and unfrequented Forrest. The Question that he is enjoyned to assoil upon pain of Life, he declares unto her. Albeit small Comfort he expect from her. This he no sooner imparts, than she returns from this unexpected Answer to bring him back to himself, from this high-beat Path of his approaching Danger.

Plight me thy trouth here in my hand (qd she)  
The next thing that I require of the<sup>4</sup>  
Thou shalt it do, if it be in thy might  
And I woll tell it you, or it be night.

Dapper Youth, quoth she, this Geer is of some weight; It is a dear wade, when your Life lies upon last Stake. Well, go to; you have travell'd far, and you are never a Chip the wiser. You shall

<sup>1</sup> Agayn the knight this oldë wyf gan rise. (l. 144).

<sup>2</sup> 'Tel me, what that ye seken, by your fey? (l. 146).  
Paraventure it may the bettrë be;

Thisë oldë folk can muchel thing, quod she.

<sup>3</sup> Coudë ye me wisse, I woldë wel quyte your hyre, (l. 152).

<sup>4</sup> The nextë thing that I requere thee (l. 154).

see an old Wife has some Wit. But first you must requite me, or I mean never to resolve you. Give me your Hand-Promise, that after I have told you this Question, you will grant whatsoever I shall demand of you, if it be in your power; Do not deny me, lest I leave you as I found you.

Haue here my trougt (qd the knight) I graunt.<sup>1</sup>

Life is sweet; he will neither deny her, nor delay her, but vows truly to perform whatsoever shall be enjoined by her.

Than qd she, I may me well auaunt<sup>2</sup>

Thy life is safe —

Be of good chear then. Your Life is as safe as mine, and safer too; for I have one Foot ith' Grave, as you may see, already. I will so truly resolve it, as the Queen herself, who first put this Question to you, shall before all that fair Assembly maintain it, that the proudest she that wears a Kerchief on her Head, shall not deny it. Withdraw your self into that Arbour, and I will tell you.

—— Without lenger speche<sup>3</sup>

Tho rowned she a pistel in his ere

And bad him to be glad, and haue no fere.

The precioucest Ear-Ring that ever he wore. What he had sought for among so many Beauteous Damosels, in so many frequented places, in such eminent Courts, and could never attain, he finds now in the Brest of an old withered Hag, in a wild Forrest, far remote from the Seat or Sight of men. Suppose him then, thus provided, now approaching the Court, where he is expected according to his Day limited, to return his Answer, where he is either to come off with Honour or Danger.

(The quene her self, sitting as a justise)

Assembled ben, his answere for to here

And afterward this knight was bode apere.

A great Assembly of women are purposely come to Court to hear this Knight's Answer, and to give their Judgments, as may be thought, whether this Question to him proposed, were by him truly or no resolved. A general Silence by an O Yes, thrice publicly cried, was to all Women enjoined. A Task, I grant of no small difficulty, but this was, to th' end this Knight should not be interrupted. The Knight, after his Appearance, and so free Audience,

<sup>1</sup> 'Have heer my trouthe,' quod the knight, 'I grante.' (l. 157).

<sup>2</sup> 'Thanne,' quod she, 'I dar me wel avante,' (l. 158).

<sup>3</sup> — With-uten lenger speche (l. 164).



with a shrill Voice and stout Spirit, as one confident of his Answer, assoiles the Question with this Resolution :

My liege lady: generally, qd. he  
 Women desiren to haue souerainte  
 As well ouer her husbonds as her loue  
 And for to ben in maistry hem aboute  
 This is your most desire, though ye me kill<sup>1</sup>  
 Both as you list, I am here at your will.<sup>1</sup>

There is nothing which a woman desires more than Sovereignty ; Command is her Content ; Dominion her Minion ; her will her Weal. This the Poet confirms :

*Nor Love, nor Life, nor Liberty, nor Land,  
 Can please a Wench, unless she have Command.*

Sovereignty is such a Pearl in her Eye, that Life is a loathing unless it be attending. Thus hath he returned his Answer ; now hear what Applause it receives in this fair Fœminine Assembly.

In all the court nas there wife ne maid<sup>2</sup>  
 He widow, that contraried that he said  
 But said, he was worthy han his life.<sup>3</sup>

By general Voice and Vote he is held worthy to have his Life. Their own Bosoms else would have condemned them, and netled the old rivell'd Hag, from whom he receiv'd that Answer, and who all the time had been silent, to have stirred her glib Tongue among them. Now imagine, after this Question so fully resolved, and the whole Court of Women ready to be dissolved, with what unexpected Joy this Late perplexed Knight was transported ; which, (behold the Mutability of all Earthly Comforts, ever sweeter in Ambition than Fruition) was as quickly exiled, by another Occurrent which now succeedeth.

And with that word, up stert the old wife<sup>4</sup>  
 Which that the knight fond sitting on the grene  
 Mercy (qd she) my soueraine lady quene—

No sooner was this Question resolved, the Knight pardoned, and all ready to depart, than up starts this old Trot, and appeals to the Queen, who sate as Chief Justice ; to whom she exhibits her Petition, after that, like another *Omphada*, she had unnimibly rushed down upon her four Quarters, and in her best homely manner had

<sup>1</sup> Read 'killë' and 'willë.'

<sup>2</sup> In al the court ne was ther wyf ne mayde (l. 187).

<sup>3</sup> But seyden, 'he was worthy han his lyf.' (l. 189.)

<sup>4</sup> And with that word up stirtë the oldë wyf (l. 190).

done her Reverence : " Madam, I am an old woman, and so must  
" youngest here be, if they live to't ; yet an old woman deserves her  
" due as well as the youngest : This gay Knight, simply though I  
" stand here, was taught by me his Answer : for which he plighted  
" me his Troth, that whatsoever I should demand at his Hand, if it  
" lay in his power, he would perform.

Before the court than pray I the sir knight  
(Qd. she) that thou me take unto thy wife  
For well thou wost, that I haue kept thy life.

You shall not say, Sir Knight, that I love you ill ; both to save  
your Life, and procure you a Wife, is no mean Courtesie. I mean to  
bestow no worse than my self on you ; and many a poor Knight  
would be heartily glad of a worse Choice. You know Promise is  
Debt ; nor can you pay your Debt, unless you tender your self.

If I say false, say nay upon thy fay.  
This knight answerd, alas and welaway.

She puts him to his Book-Oath, but he will neither take it, nor  
her by his goodwill. He must now turn over a new Leaf, and act  
another fresh Scene of Sorrow. For, thinks he, if Life be nothing  
without Society, what may that Life be worth, where he must live  
with her whom he eternally loths ? Thus to live were to die ; yea to  
die were to live, rather than embrace such a Life. Better thinks he,  
it had been by many Degrees, to have stood Mute, and submitted  
himself to the extreamest Censure, than upon such hard terms to  
have procur'd an Answer, the issue whereof will undo him for ever.  
He resolves then to make her a fair Proffer, the Acceptance whereof,  
though it should make him a Beggar, yet in his Conceipt infinitely  
happier.

Take all my good, and let my body go.  
Nay qd she, than I shrewe vs both two.<sup>1</sup>

As if he should say, I confess freely, that I have receiv'd an  
incomparable Courtesie from you ; being the next Means under God  
and my Gracious Sovereign, of preserving my Life ; Nor will I deny  
but I promis'd you upon the Answer I receiv'd from you, whatsoever  
were in my power, I would freely and without exception give you.  
But little did I expect that my self should be the Gift. Alas ! You  
are an old Woman, and should think of other matters, than such  
youthful Marriages. For what would this beget but Jealousie in  
you, Discontent in me, and some miserable End to us both ? This

<sup>1</sup> 'Nay than,' quod she, 'I shrewe us both two !' (l. 206).

Disparity in our Years, can make no true Harmony in our Affections. Age, generally is more given to the World, than the Flesh : Accept then of my Fortunes, I lay them down at your Feet, and leave me to the wide world to raise me an Estate. I have nothing too dear for you but my self; release me of that, and take all. This, he thought would have prevail'd, but he is far deceiv'd; She expressly answers him, that it was not his Fortunes that could content her; No, nor all the precious Ore, Metals, nor Minerals of the whole Earth. As his own Life was by her means saved, so expects she that his own Person shall recompense it. Set your heart then at rest, saith she, as you receiv'd from me the Benefit of your Life, so nothing will content me but being your Wife and your Love.

*My love (qd he) nay my dampnation  
Alas that any of my nation &c.*

My Love, my loathing! Hanging and wedding go by destiny, and he holds it disputable, whether his loss of life or choice of such a Wife, were the greater Misery. He holds *Martial's* opinion in his affiance to this woman.

*Paula likes me, so shall I never her,  
Because she's old, unless she elder were.*

He could be the better contented to marry her, if he were but persuaded that he should shortly become her Survivor; mean time, this is his concept; though, he received from her the benefit of his life, yet he holds his life at too high a rate to be enthralled to her love. Neither, as he verily thinks, would this disgrace which he should thus incur, by ingaging himself to this unweldy Beldame, who was a very fardel of Diseases, reflect only upon himself, but on his whole Nation: For to describe her, and bestow on her her true Character, what was she, but a sapless seer stock without verdure; a crawling creeping Cricket, without vigour; a proportionless feature without favour? One, whose mouth like a common sewer, was ever driveling; whose Nose, like a perpetual Limbeck, was ever dropping. The *Sciatica* had taken Possession of her Hip; the Megrim of her Head; An aged Film had quite covered her Eyes; And an incessant Cough taken seizure of her Lungs. Her Mouth was discharged of the Grinders; from which issued such a Steam, as it would have put a Serjeant in mind of his Mortality. Yet must this proper Puss be this Knight's dainty Bride; For howsoever he hold himself highly disparaged, his Nation dishonoured, his succeeding Hopes eternally dashed;

—— The end is this, that he  
Constrained was, thal nedes must he her wed<sup>1</sup>  
And taketh this old wife, and goeth to bed.<sup>2</sup>

He must perform his Promise; Where women are Judges, the worst of their Sex must not be wronged. Now what a comfortable Bridal this was, let them judge, who have known the misery of a Loathed Bed. But no Remedy in cases of such inevitable Necessity; He must put on the best Countenance he can, and learn to dissemble with the World, the bitterest of whose Discontents he hath now sufficiently tasted.

Now wolden some men say parauenture  
That for my negligence, I do no cure  
To tellen you the joy and the array<sup>3</sup>  
That at the feast was that ilke day.

Now some (saith this old Wife of *Bath*) will perhaps expect that I should speak of the Joy and Jollity, Feasts and Solemnity of this goodly Marriage, As first, how the Bride and Bridegroom were attired, with what Companies attended, what Dainty Cates were provided, how the Feasters were ranked, with what Musick and Melody cheared.

To the which thing answere shortly I shall<sup>4</sup>  
I say there was no joy ne feest at all.

They that expect any jovial Day at such a Bridal-Day, are much deceived; There was nothing there but Pouting, Louring, and Cloudy Weather; All things were out of temper; No Consort could keep any Concord, when the Chief of the Feast were at such mortal Discord. They that came to their Table, might be sure to find store of Foul in every Corner; Foul Looks, Foul Lips, Foul Linnen. Well may we think then;

Gret was the sorow the knight had in his thought<sup>5</sup>  
Whan he was with his wife a bedde ibrought.

He is now entring his Mount *Aetna*, or his *Caucasus* rather; for she is cold enough for any season. A perpetual Feaver now afflicts him. Rest he cannot, yet may she rest, and will not.

<sup>1</sup> Constreyned was he nedes most hir wedde (l. 215).

<sup>2</sup> And taketh his olde wyf, and gooth to bedde

<sup>3</sup> — . . . and al tharray (l. 219).

That at the feste was that ilke day.

<sup>4</sup> To which thing shortly answere I shal, (l. 221)

I seye, ther nas no Joye ne feste at al.

<sup>5</sup> Greet was the wo the knight hadde in his thoght, (l. 227).



He waloweth, and turneth to and fro,<sup>1</sup>  
 His old wife lay smiling evermo  
 And said: O dere husbonde, O benedicite  
 Fareth every knight thue as ye?<sup>2</sup>

While he makes his Bed his Rack, turning to and fro, tossing and wallowing in his Sheets of Shame, for so he holds them, his Bed-fellow expostulates the Cause with him, and with a comfortable Smile, as you may gather, by her amiable Favour and Feature, thus accosts him; 'Good God, Dear Husband, what a tossing and turning 'you make! Fares every Knight with his Wife as you do? Is this 'the Comfort of a first Nights Marriage? Marry, Fie upon Wedding 'and this be it. Are King *Arthur's* Knights so dainty of their 'Love, as they will tender no Benevolence to them from whom they 'receive the Benefit of their Life? Sure, others are neither so coy 'nor curious, so dainty nor dangerous of their Busses nor Embraces 'as you be. Am not *I* she, who preserved your Life from Danger, 'and since have married you, which deserves some Honour? How is 'it then, that like a mad man, you shew this Distemper, and with- 'hold that Freedom of Love from me, which you ought in duty to 'tender? First Night had been no such great matter, if you had 'been more sparing of your Love hereafter.

Hy, what is my gilt? for gods loue tell me it<sup>3</sup>  
 And it shall be amended if I may.  
 Amended (qd this knight) alas nay nay &c.

Sure my Guilt cannot be so great, but if you look on the Means of your Safety, that will excuse me; But if I have been in ought blame-worthy, do but impart it, and I shall amend it. Amend it (quoth the Knight) that's impossible. When I look on thy Deformity, it makes me quite forget the means of my Safety. Thy Presence makes my Bed loathsom; thy Old Age and base Birth make my Life wearisom. No wonder then, if I thus toss, turn and turmoil my self, when I see no Object that may afford to my restless Misery the least Hope of Comfort. Burst then, poor hapless Heart, since thou art destitute of all Hope, and deprived of all Means of Help.

Is this (qd she) the cause of your unrest?  
 He certainly qd he, no wonder nis.

<sup>1</sup> He waloweth, and he turneth to and fro (l. 229)

His oldë wyf lay smylinge evermo,  
 And seyde, o derë housbond, *ben'cite!*

<sup>2</sup> Fareth every knight thus with his wyf as ye? (l. 232).

<sup>3</sup> What is my gilt? for goddes love, tel me it, (l. 240).

What, saith she, is this all you can object against me? Is it my Base Parentage, or Mean Personage the only Reason of your Distast? Yes, answers he, what Reasons can be greater, when neither outward Worth, nor Equality of Birth suits with mine Honour?

Now sir (qd she) I couth amend all this  
If that me list, er it were daies three  
So well ye might<sup>1</sup> beare you unto me.

Well Sir, these are no such great Eyesores, but they might be cured; yea, and before three Daies were expired, if you demeaned your self towards me as became a Loving Husband. But whereas you stand so much upon Gentility of Blood; Trust me, sweet Spouse, these Titles are but Trifles. Those only are to be held generous, who are Vertuous; those Ignoble, who are Vicious. Nobility of Blood, if it want inward Worth, is soon corrupted; and the highest Family without Vertue, stained. It is true, we derive from our Ancestors our Descents, yet if we come short of them in Deserts, we more dishonour them, than we are honoured by them. For howsoever they confer on us their Inheritance, they cannot leave us their Goodness; That must be by our own Endeavours obtained, not to us Lineally derived. He is a right Gentleman, that has gentle Conditions; from whence he took his Name, as it agreed best with his Nature.

Wel can the wise poete of Florence  
That hight Daunte, speke in this sentence.<sup>2</sup>

Daunt, a Famous Italian Poet, of whom succeeding times have given this Approved Testimony;

*Ingenuous Daunt, who had the Art to fit  
His Subject to his Verse, his Verse to it.*

He was Laureat in his Time, and of such a pregnant present Concept, as he was no less honoured by the Eminentest Princes then living; who joy'd to be his *Mecœnas*: than memorized after his Death with a rich and sumptuous Monument, with his *Effigies* to Life engraven on it.

To in such manner rime is Dauntes tale  
Ful selde up riseth by his braunches smale  
Prowesse of man: for God of his goodnesse  
Wel that we claim of him our gentilnesse.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Read 'might' (l. 252).

<sup>2</sup> That hightē Dant, spoken in this sentence; (l. 270).

<sup>3</sup> Wel that of him we clayme our gentilnesse; (l. 274).

Here this old Woman shews her self graced with inward Worth, though she want outward Parts, in a free Delivery of her Reading both in Poetry and Philosophy. Wherein she first repeats *Daunt's* Divine Sentence, how we are to attribute all glory unto God, from whom we receive not only outward Prowess, but all inward Goodness. From our Elders, we may receive Fortunes and Temporal Blessings, which usually prejudice most, where they are possess'd most: But for inward Abilities, it is not in their power to derive them to us, nor bestow them on us. And he gives the Reason, which he confirms with a Familiar Instance: For, saith he, Should Goodness be derived lineally, then where there is any goodness in the Ancestor, it should diffuse and propagate it self to all his Family; None that descended from him, should be addicted to any Villany: There would be an Heritage of Goodness in the whole Linage. Just as Fire, should you carry it into the darkest Cell betwixt Heav'n and Frozen *Caucasus*, yet would it, according to its Natural Quality and Operation, give Light and Heat; The Darkness of the House could neither obscure nor extinguish it; till what fed it were consumed, and so it self became quenched. But it is far otherwise with Gentry; it derives no such Native Motion nor Operation from her Family.

For god it wot, men may full often find<sup>1</sup>  
A lordes son done shame and villany —

As Bastard-Slips take seldom deep Root, so the freest and most generous Plants bring not alwaies forth most Fruit. The hopefulest Cyens are oft-times most degenerate. *Catiline* and *Cethegus* were a shame to their Fathers; So were *Semphronia* and *Lucilla* to their Mothers. He or she then (saith this Moral Bride) that would be accompted Generous, let him be Vertuous; He cannot be a Gentleman, that is not endowed with a Gentle Mind. Be he or she never so nobly Descended, if Debauch'd, they are but Peasants. Neither can we justly challenge to our selves any Honour from our Ancestors, if we second them not in Actions worthy the Renown of those Ancestors. It is neither Priority of Place, nor Nobility of Race, that deserves Approving, but Gentleness and Affability, which from God have their sole Beginning.

Thinketh how noble, as saith *Valerius*  
Was thilke *Tullius Hostilins*.

<sup>1</sup> For, god it woot, men may wel often finde (l. 294)  
A lordes sone do shame and vileinye; (l. 294).

*Tullus Hostilius*, of whom so glorious a mention is made by *Valerius Maximus*, was the third King of the *Romans*, *Lib. 7. C. 4.* a Prince of Singular Sobriety, a singular Observer of all Vertues; Insomuch as his own Goodness rais'd him to that Greatness. His Poverty could not keep him from Imperial Dignity, because the Eyes of all good men were upon him; by whose general Suffrage he was elected, and to a Regal Seat advanced. Peruse likewise the Works of *Seneca* and *Boetius*, two Authors most sententiously Divine, and you shall find (saith this old Bride) that it is gentle Deeds that make one truly Gentile. By all which, she expressly concludes, that an Honourable Descent infers not ever Eminence of Desert; For as one may be Low-bred and well dispos'd, so may one be High-born, and ill-affected.

And therefore dere husbond, I thus conclude  
 Al were it that mine anceters were rude  
 Yet may that hie god, and so hope I  
 Graunt me grace to live vertuously.<sup>1</sup>

Surcease Husband, to twit me thus with Baseness of Birth; Though mine Ancestors were rude, yet if God give me Grace to be good, my Vertuous Life shall ennoble my low Line. Let not this therefore so much distast you, though my Descent be mean, I purpose to supply that Want by Deserts, if that may please you.

And there as ye of pouertie<sup>2</sup> me repreue  
 The hie God, on whom that we bilene  
 En wilful pouerte<sup>2</sup> chese to lede his life &c.

Secondly, Whereas you seem so much to tax me for my Poverty; That Condition is rather to be loved, than reproved. He who may be a Pattern to us all for Imitation, preferred voluntary Poverty before any other Condition. Neither may we think would He have chus'd it, if there had been any Evil in it. The Philosopher saith, To be silent in Prosperity, chearful in Adversity, in both to shew an Indifferency, is the highest Pitch of Philosophy. It is the Saying of *Sage Seneca*, and other Learned men, That he only is Prosperous and Happy, who contents himself with his Poverty; Admit he be not worth a Shirt to his back, he has Wealth enough, who holds himself content. He is the richest, whose Desires are fewest; He the poorest, whose Wishes are fullest. There is no Poverty but Sin properly. *Juvenal* speaks merrily:

<sup>1</sup> Grantë me grace to liven vertuously. (l. 318.)

<sup>2</sup> Read 'povert.'



*He that's so poor he is not worth a Groat,  
Before a Thief may sing a merry Note.*

Yea, to describe more fully the Excellency of Poverty; It is a Sovereign good, though generally hateful, inwardly fruitful. An expedite Dispatcher of Business; For howsoever we pay for Expedition in these Courts on Earth, this is that leads us in the expeditest Course to the Court of Heaven; It enlighteneth our Understanding, enliveneth our Conceiving, rectifieth our Judgment, if in these Gusts of seeming Affliction we be patient. These, and many other excellent Fruits produceth Poverty, though few or none entertain it willingly. Nay, which is more, it brings Man to the Knowledge of himself, and of God, who, for his Love to Man, humbled himself. Besides, It is a very clear Mirror or Looking-Glass, wherein he may distinguish Friends from Foes, and try whom he may safely trust. Reprove me then no more (Gentle Sir) for my Poverty; nor grieve your self at that which brings with it more Comfort than Misery.

*Now sir, eke of elde ye reprevē me<sup>1</sup>  
And certes sir, though none autorite  
Were in no boke ye gentils of honour  
Saine that men shuld an old wight honour &c.<sup>2</sup>*

Lastly Sir, Whereas you despise me for mine Age; If no Authority did enjoyn you, nor no Book inform you, that Age were to be revered, even your own Gentility would exact this from you, and that inbred Civility which Nature hath planted in you. When you see an Old Man, for the Reverence you bear unto his Age, you clepe him Father. Will you contemn me then, because I am like your Mother? In this respect, you should rather cherish, than discourage me, honour, than disparage me.

*Gray Hairs were once in reverence till now,  
So were deep Furrows in an Aged Brow.*

Believe it Sir, though \* Gray Hairs be young mens Terrors, they are old mens Treasures; Though young mens Laughter, they are old mens honours. More Experience is here shrouded, than Fair Looks, or Fresh Locks ever yet attained.

*Now there as ye sain,<sup>3</sup> that I am foule and olde  
Than drede you not to ben a cokewolde.*

<sup>1</sup> Now, sire, of eldē ye reprevē me (l. 351).

<sup>2</sup> Seyn that men sholde an old wight doon favour, (l. 354).

<sup>3</sup> Now ther ye seye, &c. (l. 357).

\* *Canis Juvenum Spectra, Senum Specula; Juvenum Ludibria, Senum Decora: Adag. (R. B.)*

Now whereas you still cast in my Dish, mine Age and Deformity;  
This you may use for an Antidote against Jealousie. When you are  
abroad, you need not fear me; Affection is grown so cold in me, it  
can work no strong Effects on my Phantasie. Neither will any one  
desire much to court me, for my Deformity. Decrepit Age and want  
of Beauty, are sufficient Guardians to preserve Chastity. For as Age  
is ever attended on by Honour, it is with more Reverence loved than  
lusted after.

But natheles, sin I know your delite<sup>1</sup>  
I shall fulfil your worldly appetite.  
Chese now (qd she) one of these things<sup>2</sup> twey  
To haue me foule and olde, til that I dey  
And be to you a trewe humble wife  
And neuer you displease in all my life  
Or els wol you haue me yong and faire<sup>3</sup>  
And take your aduenturst of the repaire  
That shal come to your house, because of me  
Or in some other place, may well be?

But go too Sir; I see these pleas will hardly please. The Bride  
that lyes by you must be beautiful or she will not content you.  
Beauty is a dainty Pearl in your eye. Well; you shall have your  
desire: There is nothing that may delight you, wherein I will not  
satisfie you, if it be in my power to grant you. Go to then, I will  
offer to your choice two things, wherein please your self, and you  
shall please me who am your second self. First is, whether you will  
have me aged and deformed as I now am; and so find me an humble,  
loving, and affable Wife, unwilling to displease you, ready at bed  
and board to be disposed by you, in all respects conformable unto  
you. Or else, you will have me young and fair, and subject your  
self to the hazards of beauty. For well you know, that as youth is  
sooner tempted, so is beauty soonest tainted. I cannot avoid it but  
I must have Suitors to court me, Servants to comfort me, dainty Di-  
dappers to visit me. Your house must be alwayes open to Strangers,  
mine arms to embraces, my perfum'd Lips to youthful Kisses.

Now chese your seluen whether that you liketh  
This knight wiseth him, and sore siketh  
But at the last, he said in manere:<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> But nathëlees, sin I knowe your delyt (l. 361).

<sup>2</sup> Read 'thinges' (l. 363).

<sup>3</sup> Or ellës ye wol han me yong & fair (l. 367)

And take your aventure of the repair

That shal be to your hous, &c.

<sup>4</sup> But attë laste he seyde in this manere, (l. 373).

My lady and my loue, and wife so dere  
 I put me in your wise gouernance  
 Cheseth your self, which may be more plesunce<sup>1</sup>  
 And most honour to you and me also  
 I do no force whether of the two<sup>2</sup> —

The world is well amended; Now when it is in his choyce, he stands indifferent for her Change. Yet could he find in his heart that she had Beauty, so none might share with him in her Beauty. But Jealousie is such a dangerous Malady, as to prevent all occasion, he will content himself with her Deformity, rather than become subject to so cureless an Infirmary. First therefore he here adviseth, then sigheth, lastly thus concludeth: Albeit, Dear Wife, you may imagine what Comfort it would be to me to enjoy a Beautiful Bed-fellow; one whose outward Parts might make her honoured wherever she resorted; and whose sweet Society might allay my Distasts, and improve my Comforts whensoever occasioned; yet shall not you find me so drenched or drowned in sensual Delights, as to prefer mine own Appetite before the Light of Reason. I understand by your grave and discreet Arguments, that you are wise, which is to be incomparably valued above all outward Beauty. Make choyce then of what may seem best in your own Discretion; I will in no wise give way to my own blind Affection; which of these two soever may tender you most Pleasure and Honour, chuse it, and so dispose of me and it, as your Honour may be most advanced by it. I shall hold my self content whether of these two you accept.

For as you liketh, it suffiseth me.  
 Than haue I got of you the<sup>3</sup> mastrie (qd she)  
 Sin I may chese, and gouerne as my list<sup>4</sup>  
 He certes wife (qd he) I hold it for the<sup>5</sup> best  
 Kisse me (qd she) we be no lenger wrothe  
 For by my trueth, I woll be to you bothe &c.

Now what she so long aim'd at, she has got; her *own Will*; and therein, which may seem more strange, his Happiness. You have given me, saith she, the Mastery; which shall be such a Government, as it shall not have the least tast of Tyranny. This you have done so freely, as it injoins my Usage to be friendly. Go to Sir; You shall hence find what Benefit an obedient and observant

<sup>1</sup> Cheseth your-self, which may be most plesance, (l. 376).

<sup>2</sup> I do no fors the whether of the two (l. 378).

<sup>3</sup> Omit 'the.'

<sup>4</sup> Sin I may chese, and gouerne as me lest? (l. 381).

<sup>5</sup> Omit 'for the.'

Husband may reap by resigning his Will to the Will of his Wife : You stood doubtful at first, whether of those two Offers which I made you, were to be accepted by you ; That is, whether you would have me continue as I am, Aged and Deformed, but withal Constant, Continent, and to your Command Obedient ; Or Young and Beautiful, but withal Youthful, and in danger to become Incontinent. But now I shall take from you all Occasion of Doubting, and make you happy in your Affection. For I will be to you both Young and Beautiful ; and withal so constant in my Love, so Continent in my Desires, so Moderate in my Delights, so Temperate in my Resolves, so Discreet in my Directions, so Vertuously Good and Gracious in all my Actions, as you shall find your Happiness fully Crowned in enjoying me. Nor will I feed your Hopes with any long Delay ; For by the next Morning, shall my Beauty be such, as no Lady from East to West may compare with me ; whereof, with my Life, dispose as may best please you.

And so they slepte till it was morow graie  
And than she said, whan it was daie<sup>1</sup>  
Cast by the courteine, and loke how it is.<sup>2</sup>  
And when this knight saw all this  
That she so faire was and so yong therto  
For joy he hent her in his armes two.

Howsoever it be said, that they both slept ; It is probably to be doubted, whether he, at least, slept or no. Such a longing desire he had to see this approaching Hour of her Transmutation. But when this happy Hour was approached, *Aurora* her burnish'd Beams dispersed, and the Curtain drawn aside, by which this Brides Beauty might be discerned ; it is not to be imagined how strangely this over-joyed Bridegroom was intranced. Straight-waies he inwreaths her in his Arms, looks Babies in her Eyes : and as one embathed in Bliss, a thousand times a row he kisseth her, meerly transported with joy for the Beauty he saw in her.

*Thus did they surfet it in midst of Plenty,  
Ten Kisses short as one, one long as Twenty.*

To treat farther of it, I will not ; Modesty would have this Subject enskreened, & left to the Imagination to conceive it. Let it suffice, that as her Beauty could not chuse but give him Content, so

<sup>1</sup> These two lines are spurious, and possibly composed by Brathwait himself.

<sup>2</sup> Cast up the curtin, loke how that it is. (l. 393)  
And whan the knight saugh verrailly al this  
That she so fair was, and so yong ther-to.



was she to him constant and obedient : In which mutual Affection ; seconded with perfect Joy, free from all Jar, they continued till their Lives ended.

— And Jesu Christ us sende  
 Husbondes meke, yong, and fresh a bedde  
 And grace to ouerline hem that we wed.<sup>1</sup>  
 And I pray to God, to short her lines  
 That will not be gouerned by her wines  
 And olde and angry nigardes of dispence  
 God send hem sone a very pestilence.<sup>2</sup>

Here at last this good Old Wife of *Bath* ends her long Relation with a serious Supplication ; By which she shews that she has one Colt's Tooth yet left ; Neither doth she pray only for her self, but for the whole Congregation of her Sex : That they may have Husbands *Meek*, to live with, *Young*, to love with, and *Fresh*, to lie with ; That they may ever be their Survivors ; That such Husbands may have short Lives, who will not suffer their Wives to be Governors ; And that a Pestilence may light on all such Husbands and Niggardly Cot-queans as cannot dispose of their own, but are Misers. And so ends she her Story to make her Audience merry. Thus then will we conclude our Comment, and recount the Comical Passages of their Nuptial Content, woven up in these Verses.


*The King's appeas'd, the Queen rests satisfi'd,  
 The Bridegroom joyes in his new-formed Bride  
 No Part in her appears from Top to Toe  
 But may give Nature thanks for making't so ;  
 Inward and Outward Graces joyntly meet,  
 To make his Comfort in her more compleat ;  
 Long did they live together in true Love,  
 While each with other in Affection strove :  
 " May all Folk marry so that would live well,  
 " Or let them tarry, and lead Apes in Hell.*

<sup>1</sup> And gracē t'overbyde hem that we wedde (l. 404).  
 And eek I preyē Jesu shortē hir lyves

<sup>2</sup> God sende hem sonē verray pestilence (l. 408).



## An APPENDIX.

 After such time as the Autor, upon the instancy of sundry Persons of Quality, had finish'd his Comments upon these Two Tales; the Perusal of them begot that Influence over the clear and weighty Judgments of the Strictest and Rigidest Censors; as their high Approvement of them induced their Importunity to the Author to go on with the rest, as he had successfully done with these Two first: Ingenuously protesting, that they had not read any Subject discoursing by way of Illustration, and running Descant on such Light, but Harmless Fancies, more handsomly couched, nor modestly shadowed. All which, though urgently press'd, could make no Impression on the Author: For his Definite Answer was this: "That his Age, without any Appellant, might render his Apology; and privilege him from Commenting on Conceptions (were they never so pregnant) being interveined with Levity, Saying;

"Of such light Toyes Hee'd ta'n a long Adew,  
"Nor did He mean his Knowledge to renew.

"Neither could he entertain any such thought of Perfection in these, being begun and finish'd in his Blooming Years; wherein the Heat of Concept, more than the Depth of Intellect dictated to his Pen. The Remainder of his Hours henceforth was to number his Daies: But if Æson's Herb should revive him, and store him with a new Plumage, he was persuaded that his Youthful Genius could not bestow his Endeavour on any Author with more Pleasure nor Complacency to Fancy, than the Illustrations of Chaucer.

*Amidst this Discourse, a Critick stepping in, objected out of the Quickness of his Censure, much like that Phantastical Madam, who drew Rapsodies from her Carpet, that he could allow well of Chaucer, if his Language were Better. Whereto the Author of these Commentaries return'd him this Answer: "Sir, It appears, you prefer "Speech before the Head-piece; Language before Invention; where-  
"as Weight of Judgment has ever given Invention Priority before  
"Language. And not to leave you dissatisfied, As the Time wherein  
"these Tales were writ, rendered him incapable of the one; So his  
"Pregnancy of Fancy approv'd him incomparable for the other.  
Which Answer still'd this Censor, and justified the Author; leaving New-holme to attest his Deserts; his Works to perpetuate his Honour.*

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*FINIS.*

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the Cambridge Univ. MS, Gg. 4. 27, &c., and Process Engravings, for the Ellesmere MS Part, of the 23 Ellesmere MS Miniatures. The Hengwrt MS, Part VI, contains The Canon's-Yeoman's Tale from the Lichfield MS.

- LXXII. The Six-Text, Part IX, with colored Lithographs of 6 Tellers of Tales and 6 emblematical Figures from the Cambridge Unvers. MS Gg. 4. 27; Forewords, Title-pages for the three volumes, &c.; and Prof. Hiram Corson's Index to the Subjects and Names of *The Canterbury Tales*.

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- LXXVI. Chaucer's *Bocce* from the Additional MS 10.340 in the British Museum, as edited by the Rev. Dr. R. Morris for the E. E. Text Soc. in 1868.

- LXXVII. More Odd Texts of Chaucer's Minor Poems, containing, 1. *The Complaynte to Pite*; 2. *The Complaint of the Anelida and Arceite*; 3. *Truth*; 4. *Lack of Stedfastness*; 5. *Fortune*; 6. *Purse*. Appendix: 1. *The Balade of Pite*. II. *Roumdels (Mercilesse Beaute)*.

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